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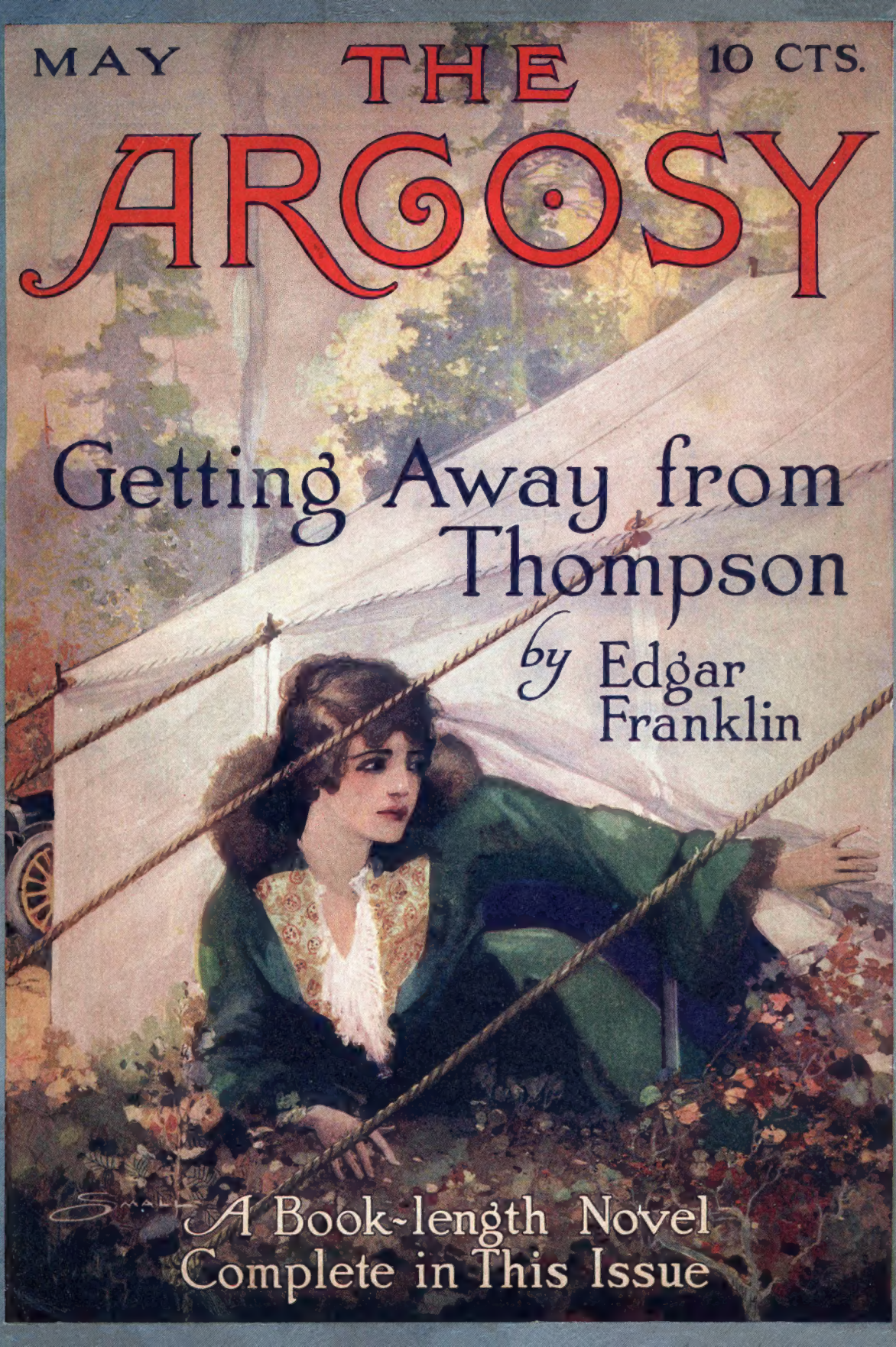
by Edgar Franklin



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THE ARGOSY

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THE JUNE ARGOSY

will be an issue you can't afford to miss, crowded from cover to cover with good stories, long and short. The Book-Length Novel smacks of the sea and under the title

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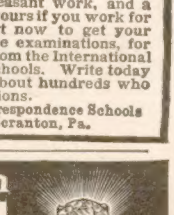

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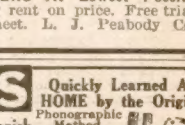

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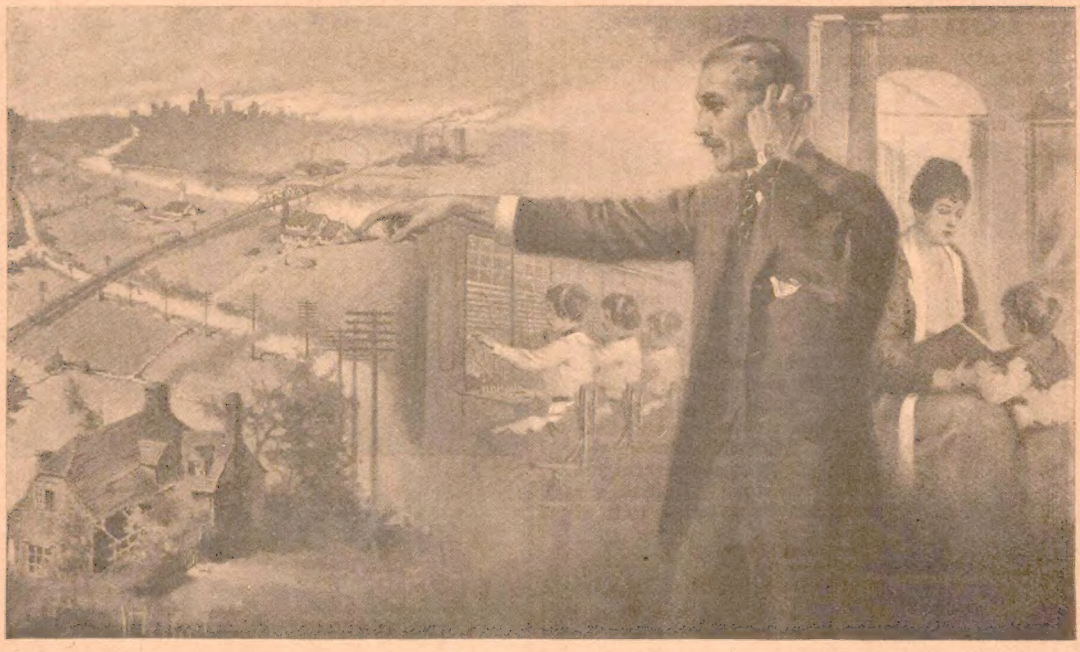

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THE ARGOSY

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Getting Away from Thompson

by Edgar Franklin

Author of "The Chase of the Concession," "The Amiable Aroma," "The Peril of the Paladin," etc.

A FULL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL COMPLETE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CRASH.

MOMENTARILY, the world stood stock still!

Through tremendous seconds the air of the room hung tense, waiting to leap into wild vibration at Jane's answer, if that should ever come. Uncle Horace stood petrified, open-mouthed, while Aunt Martha Porter-Preston clutched at her heart and made funny little noises in her throat.

Jane herself, rather greenish than merely white, struggled for the voice that had deserted her; presently it returned and she said almost inaudibly:

"Yes!"

It was at this point that Aunt Martha screamed piercingly and dropped back among the divan cushions, covering her face, and Uncle Horace, gasping hoarsely, tottered into his chair, muttering incoherently.

With that one little "yes" disaster had

fallen upon the house of Porter-Preston—just ten short minutes back as placid a wealthy household as ever wore slip-covers in early September!

Now, it is rarely that disaster comes with no warning at all, but that had been the manner of this disaster's approach. Witness the picture of calm contentment formed by these three people not half an hour ago:

Up-stairs here in the family's luxurious private living-room, Jane occupied the window-seat and gazed dreamily down the block toward Fifth Avenue, quiet and mysterious in the warm evening haze, and toward the Park beyond—and though it might endure for centuries, the window-seat would never know a prettier occupant than Miss Jane Fayre.

With Aunt Martha's back turned and Uncle Horace utterly absorbed in his eternal business documents, Jane's slender anatomy was huddled up comfortably on the wide seat, hands clasped around her knees and her exquisite cheek against the casing, the while Jane wasted her pensive and rather mischievous smile on an unappreciative outer darkness. After a tiresome summer, Jane was thoroughly glad to be home again.

This somewhat heavy Porter-Preston household was her home now, and had been ever since Jane's widowed mother married the prince and went to live in Europe. Jane herself preferred New York as a habitat, and had small use for the prince, who ran much to gout and highly scented pomades. Further, her eight-hundred-thousand-dollar portion of the late Robert Fayre's estate left her pleasantly free to live as she chose.

Just now the management of that vast sum lay between the Tricounty Trust Company, Trustee, which watched every penny with a hawklike eye, and elderly Mr. Dresser, the late Fayre's attorney, who watched the Trust Company with the eye of a mother eagle. Next week, having attained the advanced age of twenty-one, Jane was to claim the fortune for herself—and the settlement of the thousand details was one of the things that had brought the family home from Newport in these first warm days of September.

For Aunt Martha, be it said that she was merely a gentlewoman who preferred her own generation to the present wild one of submarines and automobiles. She read just now, as she always read, the impeccable work of a standard Victorian author.

She, too, was glad to be home, chiefly because in New York alone did Mr. Horace Porter-Preston cease to fuss and fume at his absence from business.

Mr. Horace Porter-Preston was a completely preoccupied, prosperous soul, who lived, breathed and ate business, thereby making millions. In his hours of alleged leisure he checked up foreign markets from the miles of ticker tape pumped daily into the basket in the library down-stairs; business sat at table with him, propped against a flower-vase or candle-stick; business went to bed with him, shaking him back to wakefulness every morning at six.

Vaguely he knew that his wife and Jane, his wife's niece, were in existence; by gazing at either of them a full minute and thinking hard he could usually detach himself from business long enough to answer their simpler questions. Beyond this he rarely went, although somewhere down-stairs he had left an urgent memorandum for himself, to drop everything else on Tuesday of next week and make sure that Jane's part of the estate was transferred properly.

That, however, was next week. To-night the countless details of to-morrow's business at the office were quite distracting him. He sat back, scowling at the ceiling; he recalled that the particular paper he needed was in drawer 7 of the larger mahogany desk below.

Directly connected with this paper were no less than nine of the documents before him. He selected them carefully, and, lips pursed, moved silently from the room and thumped softly down the wide flight.

Aunt Martha laid aside her book and yawned delicately. Quite abruptly Jane's pose became more decorous.

"Isn't it still?" she mused.

"Isn't it peaceful, though," sighed Aunt Martha, "after such a terrible summer!"

Jane, too, sighed, reminiscently, almost wonderingly.

"It did seem as if a real, old-fashioned hoodoo was after us, didn't it?" she said. "First the bad weather and then the smash when we tried the motoring trip, and then the burglar scare and the servants' strike, and after that the Provost twins getting chicken-pox and sending us all into small-pox quarantine until they learned the truth, and then—"

"I know, dear; I remember it all quite

clearly," Aunt Martha protested, with a shudder. "It was almost enough to give one some confidence in Cousin Harold's amateur astrology!"

Jane laughed impatiently.

"He predicted the war and the Lusitania," said Mrs. Porter-Preston.

"After they happened," Jane reminded her.

"And he really did say that this would be a particularly unpleasant summer for us all," Aunt Martha persisted quite stubbornly, for she was very tolerant of this favorite nephew's freaks. "And he mentioned the early part of September, too—do you remember?—and said that you were better off at home than elsewhere just then."

"Well, I'm home," Jane laughed. "That's more than most of our friends can say."

Aunt Martha laid aside her glasses and relaxed.

"I'm not sorry for that," she murmured. "Do you know, dear, I think we might take September just as a resting period?"

Ordinarily, Jane was no advocate of rest under any condition; this time, however, she nodded quite enthusiastically.

"I'm willing—just to sit perfectly still and feel that no more outrageous things can happen to us," she agreed. "I've got a dozen new books that all intelligent people are supposed to read, and I can wade through them; and Louise Devinne is home—I'll have her to talk to; and there'll be lots of time for Jones to take me out on the road and teach me how to run my lovely new six."

"I think, Jane," Aunt Martha said, disapprovingly, "that I should permit Jones to run the motor himself; it's not the task for a girl. You had better just rest, dear; there is a busy season ahead."

Jane smiled indulgently and held her peace.

"And, Jane," said her aunt.

"Yes, dear?"

"Next week you will be twenty-one," Mrs. Porter-Preston stated, significantly.

"Of course," said Jane.

"So that, *this* season—" Aunt Martha added, and permitted the sentence to die out with even added significance.

Jane's frank brown eyes came up curiously.

"What do you mean, auntie?"

Mrs. Porter-Preston smiled slightly and smoothed an imaginary wrinkle from her lap; on many topics the last generation enjoyed a shrinking lack of candor quite incomprehensible to the present era. Mrs. Porter-Preston even avoided her niece's eye as she said gently:

"You may be thinking of marriage."

"No," said Jane, with a start. "I'm not! Whatever put that into your head, auntie?"

"It is the natural thing, dear," Mrs. Porter-Preston murmured. "You know a great many very eligible young men, Jane, and—"

"But I don't want to marry any of them," Jane said restlessly. "I don't want to marry anybody!"

Aunt Martha smiled benignly.

"But the right man will appear, my dear," she stated. "It might be as well to look around and see if he isn't here already."

"He isn't!" Jane cried, with quite remarkable force. "I'm sure that he isn't and I don't want to find him if he is."

"But—"

"And even if he were," Jane said strangely and looked straight out of the window again, "I shouldn't want to know it! Really!"

Mrs. Porter-Preston turned and stared frankly at her. Oddly enough, Jane's fingers were interlocked and clutching tightly.

"What *can* you mean?" Aunt Martha asked.

"Mean? Why—I don't mean anything at all, of course!" Jane said; and as she turned and realized that the stare was upon her, the fingers whisked apart and Jane smiled so suddenly and reassuringly that the effect was startling. "All I meant was that I don't want to think about marriage for—for years to come!"

"Is the idea of marriage so unpleasant?" Aunt Martha asked.

"Oh—horribly!" escaped Jane.

"My dear!" said Mrs. Porter-Preston, and rose suddenly and laid a gentle hand on her niece's slim shoulder. "You are not in love with—"

"I am not!" said Jane.

"With an undesirable person, I mean?" Mrs. Porter-Preston insisted.

"Not with any kind of person!" Jane declared warmly. "Truly, Aunt Martha! And—oh, don't be silly, dear! I'm not abnormal and I haven't been falling in love with Jones or Dixon or anything of that kind, but I—I just don't want to think about getting married or anything else tonight. I want to sit here for another five

minutes and then go to bed. You don't mind, auntie dear?"

Very attentively Mrs. Porter-Preston studied her sister's only child for the better part of a minute. She seemed, in fact, to be quite the same Jane, except that her color was a trifle less vivid than usual. A pang of conscience stung Mrs. Porter-Preston; she had startled Jane.

"I don't mind, dear," she said lightly and returned to her book, while Jane, with lips that had tightened peculiarly these last few seconds, resumed her study of the misty avenue and breathed more rapidly.

Uncle Horace Porter-Preston reappeared and did an unusual thing. He pushed away the documents on the table and yawned tremendously, finally regarding them with a really human expression and saying:

"Upon my word, I'm tired! I believe that I'll drop this thing for the night and go to bed!"

Mildly astonished, Aunt Martha smiled at him, caught the yawn and yawned as well; while Jane, watching the performance, found her own lips parting and joined them. Then they laughed, all three of them, blissfully unaware of the disaster which, even then, had entered the portal of the home.

"I," Jane said firmly, "am going to bed, too!"

"An excellent example," said Uncle Horace, tucking his glasses into their case and blinking drowsily. "I don't know when I've been so confoundedly sleepy as—"

He stopped and looked at one Dixon, the grim and elderly citizen who had been their butler ever since Uncle Horace's first million. Always tart of expression, Dixon's face was downright acid now as he proffered a card. Uncle Horace Porter-Preston readjusted his glasses and read aloud:

"Mr. Joseph E. Boggs! Who on earth is Joseph E. Boggs?"

"No one that we know, sir," Dixon risked.

"And what an infernally filthy card!" grunted Uncle Horace, and dropped it back on the tray. "I can't see him, Dixon. If it's begging, refer him to the Charities; if it is business, tell him to see me at the office to-morrow at eleven-fifteen sharp."

"Begging pardon, sir," Dixon said grimly, "it's not you he wishes to see, sir. It is Miss Jane."

Uncle Horace turned with a frown.

"Do you know this Boggs, Jane?"

"I never heard of him," Jane said blankly. "What does he look like, Dixon?"

Dixon almost smiled.

"He's not a pleasant appearing person, miss," he submitted. "Fattish, if I may say so, and rather shabby. He has thin gray hair and a bad dent in his hat."

"I don't know anybody with thin gray hair and a dent," Jane laughed. "You'll have to get rid of him, Dixon, or learn what he wants."

"I tried it, miss, and he wouldn't say," the butler announced. "He insisted that he must have private speech with you and nobody else, and I told him—"

"Go down and tell him to get out!" Uncle Horace snapped. "He's a beggar of some sort."

"He hasn't the manner of a beggar, sir!" Dixon muttered, as he moved away.

They were forgetting Joseph E. Boggs even before Dixon had disappeared. When Sunday supplements and smart magazines have bruited to the world that a young woman is about to possess eight hundred thousand dollars in her own right, the tribe of Joseph E. Boggs is in evidence much of the time.

Jane, therefore, picked up the book which she would not read in bed and Uncle Horace bunched his documents in three neat piles, taped them and sub-consciously listened for the closing of a door downstairs.

The sound failed to come. He paused in the act of loading his tan brief-case for the morning and, quite consciously, listened. Below—and this after a five full minutes—some one was talking in a thick, determined undertone and Dixon's voice was answering in monosyllables.

Now the talk ceased and the door should have closed audibly, and still it did not. Instead, Dixon's light, regular tread was coming toward them again, and now Dixon stepped in and said apologetically:

"The person refuses to go, sir!"

"Hey?" cried Uncle Horace.

"I'd have ejected him, sir, but I didn't like to do it without asking you. There's something so brazen and assured about the man, sir, and he declines flatly to state his business. He just sat still there, sir, and kept on saying that he insisted on seeing Miss Jane alone and that it would be much to her advantage to see him!"

Jane's head came up impatiently.

"Fetch him up here, Dixon!" she said shortly. And then, as Dixon left with eye-

brows slightly elevated, she smiled at her uncle. "Somebody has sent the poor creature, of course—probably with a letter. We'll give him five minutes, rather than offend whoever sent him."

There was, however, nothing suggestive of humility in the heavy tread with which the poor creature was climbing the stairs. That step held a dogged, purposeful quality quite borne out by the appearance of the unusual individual who tramped straight through the doorway ahead of Dixon and blinked owlishly at them.

At first glance one deduced that if Joseph E. Boggs were wealthy, he spent his substance on food rather than mere outward adornment. His hat, indeed, possessed a dent and one of long standing; his coat, which had been black at one time, was shiny and greenish now and his trousers ran to horizontal circles, with a globular effect at the knee.

Beyond this, Mr. Boggs was dark, middle-aged, unpleasantly plump and the bearer of dissipation's unmistakable brands; his thin hair was mussy and his prominent eyes shifty under their fat lids.

Having examined all three of them Mr. Boggs selected a chair and settled uneasily on the edge as he grunted and said:

"How de do? Is this Miss Fayre?"

"I am Miss Fayre," Jane admitted.

"Could I see you *alone?*" Mr. Boggs inquired.

"You may say whatever you have to say here."

Mr. Boggs's bleared and unpleasant eyes looked at her squarely for a flitting instant.

"The way I understand it, this thing I want to talk to you about is a *secret!*" he said, significantly.

Jane, to be sure, did start a little, but her smile came quickly.

"I am sure you have nothing to say to me that cannot be said in the presence of my uncle and aunt," she began, "and if you have—"

"If you have, you'll be thrown out before you have a chance to say it!" Uncle Horace put in quite astonishingly. "What is it?"

Another tiny instant, Mr. Boggs smiled cynically at Uncle Horace; then, with another grunt, he shrugged his shoulders and took a fresh grip on his hat.

"All right!" he said briefly. "I sort of thought Miss Fayre would rather hear about this private, but it's just as you say. I—well, I'm bringing a little news of John Thompson."

Mr. and Mrs. Porter-Preston merely stared at him; but Jane's whole being shook as if struck a violent blow!

"Oh!" said Jane, and sat down suddenly!

"Yes, ma'am," pursued Joseph E. Boggs. "I thought you might like to hear about it, anyway, and I took it nobody else knew about it, so that's why I asked for Miss Fayre when I come here!"

"What in the name of Heaven are you talking about?" Uncle Horace demanded.

Joseph E. Boggs glanced at him patiently.

"About Miss Fayre's husband—Mr. Thompson!" he said; and, taking no account of the expressions of the two older faces, he addressed Jane directly. "Y' see, Mrs. Thompson, it's like this," he said. "I got wise—never mind how—that Thompson was leaving Batesford and coming here. So I says—"

"Here?" repeated Uncle Horace, whose hands were twitching.

"So I says to myself, maybe that there young lady wouldn't want to see him, and I says to Thompson he'd better not come without writing or something; but Thompson, he had his mind made up! He just said he was coming here to get his wife—he's coming here to claim her and there didn't seem to be any way of steering him off. Well, I got to thinking about it; y' see, he's such a big, determined cuss, and when he said he'd chase her down to the end of the world and claim her, I says—"

"Stop, you lunatic!" thundered Uncle Horace Porter-Preston. "I—"

"I says to myself," Joseph E. Boggs proceeded doggedly, "that most likely a young lady like that, with plenty of money, might be sorry she ever married a guy like Thompson! Y' see, he's starting to-night, if he hasn't started now, and he'll be here some time to-morrow—and the way he talked, he's going to keep on till he gets you, lady. So it struck me that mebbe you'd pay pretty well to have him steered off somewhere and I could manage that if you was to make it worth my while and—"

That was the end of Mr. Boggs's speech. Many years before the business fever overtook him, Uncle Horace was famous all over the country as the greatest tackle his college had ever known and even a quarter of a century indoors had not quite spoiled him.

Uncle Horace, then, moving suddenly

across the room, dropped his claw-shaped hands on Joseph E. Boggs—and almost instantly neither of them was among those present.

There came a rattle and a tremendous thud, as Joseph E. Boggs hit the bottom of the flight. Also, there was a queer laugh, as Uncle Horace tripped lightly downward after him.

Then a loud bang echoed, this being caused by the knob of the front door as it struck the wall—and when a shriek of protest in Mr. Boggs's voice had been followed by a softer, more distant thud, utter silence reigned for several seconds.

Eventually the front door closed and Uncle Horace's voice sounded clearly:

"Very well, Dixon! But remember this: the next drunken maniac who gets in here will be the man who starts you out looking for another job!"

Not wholly ashamed of his prowess, Uncle Horace strolled into the living-room again, buttoning his right cuff.

"I don't know whether Dixon is getting old or careless," said he, "but if anything like that happens again, we'll make a change! Upon my soul! I don't know what the city supports a police force for, when a besotted thug like that one can wander loose and make his way into—"

For the first time Uncle Horace chanced to look straight at Jane. His words were cut off as if by a knife. He stared at Jane who, huddled down in her chair, was glaring at him with great, scared eyes, set in a pallid countenance!

"It isn't possible that you ever heard of this Thompson?" Mr. Porter-Preston gasped incredulously.

Jane merely nodded assent, for she was beyond speech. Uncle Horace's jaw dropped suddenly; he tried to come nearer.

"You're not—*not married to him?*" he choked.

It was then, after the long, terrible pause, that Jane contrived her faint, distant:

"Yes!"

CHAPTER II.

WHAT HAPPENED AT BATESFORD.

ORDINARILY, they were well-bred people and very self-contained. Had the ceiling of the living room fallen without warning and left them uninjured, they would have exclaimed in an undertone and brushed off the bits of plaster; had Dixon elected to enter and drop dead at their feet, they would have expressed polite regret and telephoned immediately, but without excitement, for the family doctor.

But that one word of Jane's sent poise hurtling from its lately solid foundation and made hollow mockeries of restraint and cold thought.

For a minute or more it seemed that Uncle Horace, despite his trim, muscular build, would succumb to apoplexy. During a similar period Aunt Martha threatened to pass from this life, propelled into the next by sheer shock.

Jane saw neither of these impending calamities; hands over her face, Jane merely shook. No tears came from her and no sound; she was one solid, sickened tremble, quaking so violently that the chair beneath her creaked in protest.

Several dozen perfectly incoherent words had jerked from Mr. Porter-Preston's lips before he succeeded in piecing together an explosive:

"It isn't—the truth!"

"It is!" Jane said faintly.

And now, curiously enough, Aunt Martha had become the calmest of the three. Decidedly jarred still, she nevertheless arose and hurried to Jane's side, patting the girl's shoulder as she murmured:

"Well, never mind, dear! Never mind!"

"But I do mind!" Jane cried, as her hands came down. "I mind so awfully that—"

"But my darling," Aunt Martha protested gently, "we should have found it out sooner or later, in any event, and what a silly little girl you were to keep such a thing secret!"

"I wasn't silly!" Jane corrected wildly. "Would *you* want to be shot?"

Out of this, apparently, Aunt Martha made nothing at all; indeed, she hardly heard the words, for her mind was already shaping romantic pictures of the meeting presumably just ahead and she purred:

"There, there, dear! It is quite all right."

"But it isn't!" Jane said thickly.

"Oh, but it is, you foolish child," her aunt smiled. "There cannot be an objection in the world to a man you would marry, dear—and think how happy you will be when your husband does come and claim you!"

This brought Jane to her feet. Terror-

filled eyes glared at her aunt for an instant and her voice struck a high, hysterical pitch as she cried:

"There's every objection on earth to this man and I won't let him claim me! I won't be claimed or—"

"Jane!" Mr. Porter-Preston interjected sternly.

"You won't let him get me?" Jane asked her uncle, quite piteously.

"Nothing shall harm you," Uncle Horace stated, "but first of all, let us understand this—this amazing thing. Be seated, my dear, and control yourself."

Jane's knees, it seemed, were but too willing to obey.

"It is true that you are married, Jane?"

"Yes."

"Lately?"

"Nearly a year ago," Jane shuddered.

"Where?"

"Up in Batesford."

"When you were stopping with Edith Barr?" Aunt Martha put in.

"Yes."

"And she never told, either!" said Mrs. Porter-Preston.

"She never knew!"

"Just let *me* sift this thing, Martha, please," Uncle Horace requested. "Jane is upset; and—where did you meet this Mr. Thompson, Jane?"

"In Batesford."

"How long had you known him when you married him?"

"About ten minutes," said the astonishing niece.

"Well, what sort of man—" Uncle Horace gasped. "Who on earth is he?"

"He's a burglar; that's his business, I think!" Jane said simply.

And then, because she was young and safe for the moment at least and usually quite sane, Jane ceased her trembling and laughed outright, albeit there was no overwhelming mirth in the laugh.

"Please don't look at me like that," she implored rather unsteadily. "It wasn't anything that I could help and I hoped—oh, I don't know what I hoped, but I'll tell you about it."

"You should have told us about it rather sooner," her uncle suggested, gravely.

Jane smiled miserably.

"You'll see in a minute why I didn't," she said. "It was really Edith Barr's fault—or the fault of that French couple that kept house for her, anyway. You see, they left that day after some sort of argument and Edith and I had Edie's country house all to ourselves. Her mother didn't come up till days after—after it happened."

She paused. Mrs. Porter-Preston, whose hands had folded, delivered herself quite severely:

"I suppose that Edith *is* a prominent artist and wealthy and has a right to a certain amount of eccentricity, if her people insist on indulging it; but I have always thought that permitting her to own a dozen little houses in a dozen villages, just for the sake of living in them and gathering her wretched atmosphere, was rather insane. It's bad enough for the girl to travel around alone as she does, but when she drags her friends to a benighted hole like this Batesford—"

"Oh, Batesford's pretty enough, up there among the mountains, and Edith didn't actually drag me there," Jane smiled forlornly. "We were having a nice, quiet little time together, until this happened. However, that's what the French pair did, and it left Edie and me all alone—and of course that was the night of the Marchley dinner, away over at White Falls. I had a wretched headache and didn't want to go anyway, so when the Winslows came for Edith with their motor, I made her go."

"Leaving you *quite* alone in the house?" Aunt Martha inquired.

"It never occurred to me to be afraid," said Jane. "The house next door isn't forty feet away, you know, and it was all so peaceful and still that I really enjoyed the evening, with the crickets chirping outside and the trees sighing. I meant to sit up for Edith, for she couldn't get back before one o'clock; but just before midnight the telephone rang.

"You see, the Winslow's car broke an axle or something and couldn't be fixed for days, and they couldn't get another for love or money. They had to spend the night in a farmhouse—and Edie was all excitement at the idea of my being there alone."

"Is it possible?" Mrs. Porter-Preston asked tartly.

"It didn't worry me," sighed Jane. "I told her to go to bed on the horsehair couch they'd fixed, and that I'd be quite all right—and then I went to bed myself and fell sound asleep. It must have been after two in the morning when I woke up suddenly listening. One does that, sometimes, you know.

"Well, I listened for a minute or more and it seemed to me that somebody was sawing something somewhere, but that it wasn't in our house. I got up and went to the window; it was a lovely moonlight night and you could see the hills for miles and miles. And there—next door and just stepping into the window—was the biggest man I ever saw in all my life!"

Down-stairs Dixon closed a window quite noisily. Jane, having suppressed a small scream and stilled another tremble, smiled apologetically.

"It was—awful!" she went on. "Just standing there and watching him and realizing that he was a burglar, you know. They say that old man next door keeps heaps and heaps of money hidden in the house, and I suppose that that was what he was after. Anyway, I watched him for half a minute before it occurred to me that he ought to be arrested.

"I went down-stairs to the telephone and spent another five minutes trying to raise Central before I remembered that one doesn't telephone in Batesford after midnight—so I went up-stairs and looked across again, and there he was, so big that he filled the whole room, walking about with one of those little pocket flashlights."

"My child! My child!" breathed Mrs. Porter-Preston.

"Well, then I remembered that there must be a sheriff or something in Batesford and that the sooner some one roused him the better—and there was nobody to rouse him but me! I hurried into some clothes as fast as I could and stole out of Edie's house; and—I don't know why, but I'd never seen a burglar at close range before and I just *had* to have another glimpse of this one, to make sure he was still there. I crossed the little patch of lawn without making a sound and peeked through a corner of the window."

"He was still there?" Uncle Horace asked with real interest.

"He was not only there, but he was right beside the window and waiting for me!" Jane said, turning pale again. "He just reached out one hand and caught me under the arm and put the other hand over my whole face. Then he lifted me bodily into the room!"

"Jane!" cried Mrs. Porter-Preston.

"There wasn't a particle of effort to it; he did it as easily as one would lift a cat!" her niece pursued. "He stood me on my feet and looked at me through the holes in his mask and he said that if I made one sound he'd tear me in little pieces—and he could have done it.

"Well, I couldn't have made a sound if my life depended on it; I may live to be a hundred, but I can never be quite so frightened again. I was ice-cold from head to foot, and all the time he looked at me and mumbled something about never making a getaway if I went loose. Then somebody moved up-stairs and it sounded as if they were walking!"

"And you *lived* through that!" her aunt breathed.

"I don't know how; my heart wasn't beating—it didn't beat one beat for an hour or more," said Jane. "However, the burglar heard that step and he lifted me straight out of the window again and stepped out with me—and there we were together in the moonlight and almost at the same second we heard somebody walking on the little cement sidewalk that runs along the main street! The burglar just leaned over and told me to walk with him and that if I didn't he'd kill me on the spot. I walked!"

"Where?" asked Uncle Horace.

"Straight to the sidewalk, because, I suppose, there would have been no hope of disappearing in the garden with all that moonlight. There was a young fellow passing and he stared at us for an instant and walked on—and he was hardly past when two people jogged by in a buggy and stared at us, too.

"That made the burglar swear, horribly! He said something about being identified and then, as we came into the shadow of some big trees, he stopped short, chuckling awfully. His mask was off then, of course, and I could see his face . . . He was the wickedest looking man I ever saw, and he was every inch of seven feet tall!"

A shuddering breath escaped Jane, and for a little she seemed quite absorbed in the memory, but she started as Uncle Horace coughed and went on quickly:

"What happened after that isn't very clear; I was too frightened! He backed me up against a tree and held my shoulders and told me to listen to him. He said he couldn't knock my brains out now, because he'd been seen with me and he was too big to escape a real man-hunt. But he said he had a better scheme than that and that I'd agree to it or die.

"Then he showed me his automatic pistol; he said it had ten shots and that one would do for me and the other nine for whoever chased him, if it came to that. He put that awful pistol in his pocket and jammed the end of the muzzle against my ribs, hard; then he bent over close to me and swore that, at the first sign of my trying to give an alarm or the first hint that I meant to disobey him, his coat would be on fire and I'd be dead! . . . It was so queer, too! I couldn't think one thought, yet I seemed to understand perfectly!"

"I'll see that he goes up for life, be sure of that!" Uncle Horace stated. "Go on!"

"I don't know just how it happened, but we walked and walked and after a while we were in a little office-like room at the back of a house and there was a funny little man in a bath-robe. His name was Codd, and he was the local judge, I think, and town clerk and everything else.

"Whatever he was, the burglar was talking to him and smiling and explaining that we had come to be married and that I was very nervous and that he'd better get it over quickly. The justice said something about a license and Thompson—he had given his name you know—gave him several bills and asked him to fix it, and the Codd man said he probably could. Then he asked my name—"

"And you gave it?" gasped Aunt Martha. "Your right name?"

"I never thought of giving any other; I couldn't have thought up one just then, anyway," said Jane. "So he called in a hired man and a maid, I think she was, and he married us. And all that time, the muzzle of that pistol was grinding against my side and I knew that if I made one slip it would all be over.

"I remember that the hired girl ran out to the kitchen and brought a jar of rice and threw some at us—and then we were out in the moonlight again and that horrible Thompson creature was looking at his marriage certificate and chuckling!"

Aunt Martha pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. Jane sighed heavily.

"Well, he marched me along beside him until we were out of sight of the house and then we stopped again. His hands were bigger than tennis rackets and he gripped my arms with them and made quite a speech, shaking me hard whenever he wanted to drive in a point.

"He said that we were married now and that the law gave him a perfect right to take me with him, but he didn't want me. He said that he had fixed it with the justice to keep the marriage quiet and that, for the present anyway, he himself wasn't going to say anything about it.

"He explained that he was perfectly safe now, because if any one connected him with the burglary he'd make me prove a perfect alibi for him—he said he'd swear that he had been calling on me secretly and that we decided to elope, and with the ceremony and the justice and all, any court would believe him. He said that if I ever tried to testify against him, his lawyer wouldn't permit a wife to testify against her husband; and then he shook me very hard and said that, everything else apart, if I ever breathed one solitary word of what had happened, he'd find me and kill me! He said that he would come and claim me for his wife and then take me away somewhere and slaughter me—*and he meant it!*" said Jane, with deep conviction.

"And then?" moaned Aunt Martha.

"Then he threw me away from him and ran between two houses and disappeared, and after a long time I managed to totter back to our house. . . . That's why I had the queer nervous breakdown at Edie's. She and the doctor thought that it was the terrific strain of being left alone all night, and Edith was so conscience stricken that she nearly wept her eyes out and they made me stay in bed for two days," Jane concluded. "And that gave me time to think it all out. I decided to keep quiet—and I've done it!"

Uncle Horace sat back slowly and drew a long breath.

"That's the most amazing story I ever heard!" he said energetically. "But you did the worst thing possible in keeping it to yourself, child! You should have wired me instantly and—and—"

Pure indignation choked him. Jane looked at Mr. Porter-Preston with fear in her eye and no apology for its presence.

"Uncle," she said earnestly, "*you* never saw Thompson!"

"I don't care if the scoundrel is as big as the Woolworth Building and wickeder than Old Nick himself!" Uncle Horace cried wrathfully. "I'll make him wish that before he made himself your husband—"

"Sssh! Ssssh!" cried Mrs. Porter-Preston, frantically; and again as she hurried to close the door: "Ssssh! The servants!"

"Well, what on earth—"

"Horace, hush!" Jane's aunt implored. "Can you understand that the most important thing of all is to keep this dreadful thing secret? Can't you see that just one breath of such a thing would absolutely ruin Jane? What—oh, what would people say!"

"If anything leaks out, the truth will leak out!" Uncle Horace declared. "I'll see to that!"

"Yes, but who would ever believe the truth?" Mrs. Porter-Preston asked, with some reason. "Can't you fancy the way people would smile at that story, behind our backs? Think of the way they might —yes, and they would!—construe it, and—oh, Jane! Jane!"

Tears flowed suddenly from the elder lady's eyes. Uncle Horace Porter-Preston rubbed his chin and looked rather dazedly at his niece, while Jane herself gazed miserably back at him.

"Why on earth didn't you scream for help?" demanded the gentleman. "Why didn't you throw yourself on the justice's protection, once you were in the house."

Jane's lips quivered.

"Uncle," she said, "you don't understand —nobody could without seeing Thompson and the gun he carries. I thought of doing that—at least, I believe I did—but we'd all have been stone dead within ten seconds!"

Mr. Porter-Preston pursed his lips and considered Jane very thoughtfully. In all her life, she had never told a lie; that he knew. And she was anything but the sort of young woman to cherish a secret romance and seek to cover it with such a tale as this.

The story of her marriage might be wild to the point of incredibility, but it was cold fact nevertheless. Also, it struck Uncle Horace, Jane just now was the prettiest and most miserable young woman in the country—and abruptly he snapped his fingers and laughed shortly.

"Don't huddle down there as if the last hope had vanished, child," he admonished. "It amounts to nothing at all in actual fact. Marriage under such circumstances is no marriage at all. I'll see Dresser to-morrow and learn whether it is necessary to have the thing formally annulled."

"And if it is, it must be done without publicity!" Aunt Martha put in frenziedly. "And you, Jane, dear! You're excited and unstrung. Be sure—*oh, be sure!* that not one word of this dreadful affair escapes you!"

"I've kept pretty quiet so far, haven't I?" Jane sighed drearily.

It was characteristic of Uncle Horace that now, with the first shock over and himself thoroughly awake again, he should open the brief-case and scan the titles of several documents; but he pushed the case aside almost immediately and arose.

"I suppose the first thing is to find Boggs again," he muttered. "I kicked him out of the house too soon."

Jane shuddered. Her uncle, with a meditative nod, left the room suddenly; and for a matter of minutes Jane sat in silence, contemplating the broken figure of her aunt, who melted into tears again at the moment of Mr. Porter-Preston's vanishing.

As a matter of fact, Aunt Martha rather puzzled Jane just now; Aunt Martha had never been married by a burglar nor had her tender ribs ever known the blood-freezing contact of a pistol muzzle. Aunt Martha had not put in the last year wondering just what might be the proper thing to do, starting every time the name of Thompson was mentioned and trying, time after time, to confide in her Uncle Horace without feeling sure that a bullet would come through the window as she talked.

Now that the dreadful secret was out, indeed, sweet relief surged all through Jane Fayre; she knew many of the sensations of the murderer who has carried his crime locked in his breast until conscience dragged it to the light; and she was smiling her real old smile again and on the point of going over to comfort Aunt Martha when Mr. Porter-Preston bustled in once more.

"He's gone—Boggs!" he announced, while his eye strayed to the brief-case and reluctantly strayed away again. "Dixon watched him, it seems, for fear he'd come back. He ran to the corner and jumped on a down-town car. I'll have detectives after him first thing in the morning, though —and as soon as we can find him we'll have an accurate idea of Thompson's movements. If he is likely to land here to-morrow, I want to know the time, so that you'll be on hand to identify him and—"

As if drawn upward by a steel cable, Jane left her chair! Numbing relief and the soothing reaction of her confession left her; Jane's eyes dilated rather crazily and her mouth opened wide with:

"What?"

"To identify Thompson," her uncle repeated patiently, "and—"

"Uncle Horace," Miss Fayre said swiftly, "I wouldn't identify that man for—no, not for fifty million dollars!"

"Eh?"

"No! Even if he were handcuffed and had an armed guard on each side of him, I wouldn't knowingly come face to face with Thompson again for all the money in this world!"

"But that's absurd. You will be here and—"

"I shall not be here!" Jane announced with absolute conviction. "I shall be somewhere else! I'm going away!"

"To-night?"

"Early to-morrow morning!"

She was, according to Uncle Horace's view, quite hysterical. She would have to be quieted down and that tactfully. Uncle Horace tried gentle argument.

"But if this Thompson is such a terrible person," said he, smiling, "he would find you anyway, Jane. He'd learn your address and—"

"He shan't!" cried Jane.

"But he would, you know, and—"

This time Jane shook her head wildly and grew wholly unreasonable.

"He shan't!" she panted. "I'll go to a place without any address!"

CHAPTER III.

THE PLACE WITH NO ADDRESS.

IN certain exalted circles it was common gossip that, on occasion, Jane's mama caused her prince and all his family to walk a chalk-line. Jane, happily, inherited her father's more lovable and less arrogant disposition, but it impressed Uncle Horace quite suddenly that hints of the maternal strain were not altogether lacking.

Jane, indeed, seemed to have lost much of her fright in the wave of determination that had engulfed her. Her full lips were compressed, her soft eyes astonishingly defiant, as she shook her head emphatically at Uncle Horace.

Mr. Porter-Preston caused his voice to grow even more soothing.

"Jane, dear," said he, "you're really exciting yourself about nothing at all. I'm afraid they haven't invented a place without some sort of address and—"

"Then I'll invent one!" Jane declared forcefully. "Because I'll never stay here and come face to face with that monster! You can do what you like with him, if he doesn't kill you first—shoot him or poison him or torture him to death—but I *will not* be here to see him!"

"But, my dear—" Aunt Martha began.

"And I know where I'll go, too, and it hasn't any address," Jane hurtled on. "I'll take to the road!"

"As a tramp?" Uncle Horace asked indulgently.

"As the hostess of an automobile party on tour!" Jane said triumphantly. "You'll chaperon it, aunt?"

Aunt Martha's eyes opened suddenly and with a dismal horror.

"September, you know—we were going to rest?"

"That was before I had any idea of Thompson turning up," her niece said. "I'm not going to rest now. I'm going to get out of this town and move so fast that he couldn't find me if he hired all the detectives in the country!"

"If you insist upon running away," put in Uncle Horace, who was a great believer in cold reason and an appeal to the better nature, "your aunt will have to accompany you, of course. But the whole idea of flight is perfectly ridiculous, my child. Just calm yourself and think for a moment. If you wish it, I can have the house surrounded by a cordon of police. The commissioner is a friend of mine—"

"And the newspaper notoriety?" Aunt Martha asked breathlessly.

"I hadn't thought of that," confessed Uncle Horace.

"And it wouldn't do a particle of good," Jane submitted. "I know that seems silly to you, but that's because you never saw Thompson. Truly, he'd mow them down and come straight in—and I don't want to be here. I'm afraid!" said Jane. "And an automobile trip will not be so bad, aunt."

"I detest hotels," that lady remarked sadly.

"We're not going to any, dear; what would be the use of that, when Thompson might get track of me from the registers? We're not going near a hotel or a town either, if I can help it; at night we'll run in off the road and camp."

"Camp!"

"Hundreds of people are doing it this year and they say it's no end of fun. I'll ask Jack Weston first, because he had a

whole camping equipment made for his car and he'll let us have it and know how to do everything. Then I'll invite Louise Devinne and the Sanfords—that will be seven of us with Jones driving."

Jane nodded enthusiastic assent to her own plans. "And we'll start about nine o'clock in the morning."

Aunt Martha gripped herself, visibly.

"To-morrow morning?" she asked with some difficulty.

Jane, looking at her stricken aunt, hesitated and weakened for an instant.

She loved Mrs. Porter-Preston dearly and ordinarily she would have gone to great lengths in the way of sparing the elder lady annoyance. Her lips parted for contrite words—but suddenly across her mental vision flashed a picture of that awful night in Batesford.

Jane steeled herself and avoided Mrs. Porter-Preston's eye.

"Yes, dear, to-morrow morning," she said. "I'll go and telephone them now."

"It's after ten," suggested Uncle Horace.

Jane, moving swiftly toward her own rooms and her telephone, seemed not to hear. Uncle Horace gazed after her and sighed and shook his head; and then, since he had been fingering the brief-case thoughtfully, he opened it once more and glanced at the topmost packet of papers.

"Horace," said his wife, "is it possible that this thing has happened?"

"Er—it would seem so," Mr. Porter-Preston conceded, with a touch of preoccupation.

"You will take the necessary legal steps at once?"

"Of course."

Aunt Martha spoke with almost increasing earnestness:

"You will not permit her to go on this wild trip, even if the others are insane enough to consent?"

"Um—Jane seems badly frightened," Uncle Horace told the brief-case. "The shock of seeing the man might prove injurious or—this Thompson, that is to say, seems to have made a tremendous impression on her—ah—"

His voice trailed away. Mrs. Porter-Preston's rose a trifle.

"But camping out, Horace! I'm not fit for it, really. And Louise Devinne is wild and young Weston even wilder—and the Sanfords aren't staid, you know. There is no telling where they may decide to go . . .

"Of course, even *they* won't accept, on this short notice, but if they should, Horace, I want you to talk very seriously to Jane, and see if it isn't possible to have her abandon the whole idea, and simply stay at home. You can hire a detective or two, if you really think it necessary, I suppose, and leave them down near the door, but you *will* talk to her?"

She waited. Uncle Horace, who had unfolded the topmost paper, shook his head and growled suddenly, bending closer and scowling.

"You will, Horace?" Mrs. Porter-Preston repeated sharply.

"I—I beg your pardon, my dear?" said Uncle Horace, glancing up with his familiar apologetic smile. "I believe I wasn't listening."

And, having waited one polite second, his eyes dropped again and, essentially, he had left her quite alone. Aunt Martha sighed heavily and stared straight ahead—and it was thus that Jane found her many, many minutes later, as she entered with less speed and a rather dreary smile.

"They all declined?" Aunt Martha cried with sudden hope.

"Jack didn't," said Jane. "He can't tell until early morning whether his partner will let him go or not, but he's sending his man to the garage to-night with the camp stuff—to strap it on the car, you know. He said that if he couldn't join us he'd send some one more entertaining."

"And the others?"

"Well—Louise is going out of town to-morrow, and she asked me to take Mary Callum in her place. Mary seemed pleased," said Jane, without a touch of enthusiasm.

"She's a dear, quiet little thing."

"To a fault," sighed Jane. "The Sanfords couldn't go, either. I asked the Jim Hapworthys instead."

"You hardly know them."

"They'll do, though, and Mr. Hapworthy was quite anxious to come."

"He," observed Aunt Martha, "is a little beast!"

"I'm not overfond of him myself, but I've got to have somebody in the party or it won't be a party!" Jane said desperately. "Oh—Jones can't drive us, by the way. His mother's very ill."

"Well, that, of course, settles the whole matter," Mrs. Porter-Preston stated, with satisfaction unconcealed. "Because that

car of yours is a very delicate piece of machinery, and likely to fly in little pieces in strange hands; you know, the automobile people themselves said that not one man in a hundred was qualified to drive it."

"It doesn't spoil my party," Jane corrected, rather doggedly. "Jones found me another driver before he left—a man who has been driving the same kind of a car for a year. His name is Cragg, and he will be here at nine sharp."

"Does Jones know him?" Aunt Martha asked, faintly.

"Yes, dear, and vouches for him, so I suppose he's all right. Uncle!"

Mr. Porter-Preston glanced up absently. "Eh?"

"Will you ask Dixon to sleep on the bench beside the door to-night and have the second man stay awake somewhere near the back windows?"

"If you wish it."

"I'm sorry about being married and making all the excitement and rushing off like this," his niece said forlornly, "but—Thompson might turn up before morning!"

Thompson did nothing of the kind.

Jane, waking to the early sunshine, was conscious that in spite of all she had slept splendidly, and now, in the daylight, the Thompson proposition had lost some of its terrors. Not that Jane contemplated remaining home and confronting the gentleman, but the chance of escaping unscathed to the broad highways seemed much brighter than last evening.

Nor, when heart and blood are young, is there anything distasteful in the prospect of a long run in a new car, through autumn woods, and with—at least reasonably—congenial people.

Jane, indeed, was actually humming as she hurried breakfastward, but she ceased her humming at the sound of the voice behind the closed door of Aunt Martha's room. A moment she listened; then she entered and it was as she had feared.

Aunt Hettie, Mrs. Horace Porter-Preston's acidulated step-sister, had apparently arrived early for a visit!

Mrs. Porter-Preston herself had not yet arisen; on the table at her bedside three bottles and two pill-boxes added to the impression that was forming in Jane's brain.

"The sciatica?" she asked instinctively.

"It began about midnight," Aunt Martha responded.

"I'm sorry," said Jane. "I—"

Aunt Martha smiled through her pain.

"It is all right, dear," she said. "The thing has to run its course as usual, but it shall not interfere with your plans. I sent for Aunt Hettie, and she will take care of you on your trip."

Jane nodded silently, for the time bereft of speech. There are aunts and aunts; Aunt Hettie was not of the kind one would select as chaperon to an ostensibly merry party.

Chronic disapproval of everything on earth had drawn deep, hard lines in her thin, elderly countenance; her eye, eternally, was cold and unfriendly and her voice rasped. At her side just now stood a lean, rusty little black bag that could have belonged to nobody under the sun but Aunt Hettie—?"

"You're not going to tear around the country at sixty miles an hour on this ridiculous excursion?" she asked pleasantly.

"Why—I just meant to jog along slowly—just a sort of lazy jaunt," Jane stammered. "But if you don't want to come, Aunt Hettie—?

"I don't, but I'm going. Why you should be permitted to race off like this when you've not been home twenty-four hours is beyond me."

Jane's lips opened and, as she caught Aunt Martha's warning eye, closed again.

"Jane loves the country; there's really no reason why she should be penned up here," Aunt Martha said gently. "Run along and have your breakfast, dear; it is growing late."

Silently the unwilling Mrs. Thompson moved away. She sought her Uncle Horace, meaning to plead with him that Mrs. Hapworthy would constitute a perfectly efficient chaperon and that Aunt Hettie, detesting travel at best, might be spared the duty.

Uncle Horace, as it happened, having been kept from his offices these many weeks, had succumbed to their lure very early this morning and fled, laden down with brief-cases and bundles of documents. Dixon, as he served her lonely meal, communicated this news and added that Mr. Weston had telephoned just after seven.

"That he will be here?" Jane asked hopefully.

"That he cannot come, miss," Dixon corrected. "He said he'd be sending an-

other gentleman in his place—some one you'd met, he said, miss, and he'd come with the car."

"And the name?"

"He didn't give the name, miss. He laughed," said Dixon.

The corners of Jane's alluring mouth, which had ceased pointing upward at the sight of Aunt Hettie, left their level position and took to pointing downward quite dismally.

Jack Weston himself was the very best kind of company, of course; she had counted on him to leaven Mary Cullum's too subdued presence—but Jack owned and cherished many dear friends who bored Jane to extinction. Something told her that Jack had picked one of them as his substitute on this evidently rather ill-starred adventure, for Jack was a busy person these days and likely to select the first man who occurred to him as eligible and who was free to go.

Something kept on telling her the same thing as the clock hands went around and she watched her maid pack the little case that was to hold all her immediate personal belongings for—how long?

When, just before nine, she heard the car at the curb, heard the door open and close again, Jane could endure the suspense no longer. Prepared for the very worst, she ran down-stairs and into the reception-room.

And she stopped short and flushed suddenly at the sight of the large and distinctly well-favored young man who arose.

"Mr. Farnham!" said Jane, and the corners of her mouth upturned on the instant.

The gentleman bowed humbly.

"I'm the thing that has been thrust upon you at the last minute," he said rather doubtfully. "Do you mind very much?"

"I'm tickled to death!" Jane said quite candidly.

"Really?" the substitute asked eagerly.

"Because I've been fearing that Jack might send any one of half a dozen men who—well, you were not one of them, at any rate," Jane dimpled entrancingly. "Were you very much startled at being hurled into a motor party like that?"

Young Mr. Farnham beamed down upon her.

"I was so delighted at the idea of getting into the air again that I forgot deliberately that we had met just twice, Miss Fayre, closed my eyes to all other considerations and simply accepted. I've been shut up tight in a steel works this last month or more, and this chance was too good to lose."

Elsewhere the clock struck nine. Jane started. She did not recall at just what hour the thing left Batesford, but she remembered very clearly that one of the through trains reached the Grand Central at precisely nine-two!

"Well—it's sudden, of course, although all of this is sudden," Jane said jerkily. "But—shall we start at once?"

"Going to make time on the road?"

"Not at all," said the hostess. "I thought we'd just jog along lazily, wherever we pleased, you know, but—"

"But we'd better hurry up and begin being lazy?" young Mr. Farnham concluded for her, chuckling. "I'm more than willing."

He beamed after her as she sped away to bid farewell to one aunt and summon another. Although Jane was not aware of the phenomenon, he beamed at the spot she had occupied for a minute or more after she had gone. Nor was there anything conspicuously morose about Jane Fayre as she confronted her aunts. Her eyes sparkled and her color had risen to normal again and perhaps a little higher.

"We're all ready to start, Aunt Hettie," she said vivaciously. "Jack sent Mr. Farnham in his place; isn't that good?"

"What Mr. Farnham?" Aunt Hettie inquired truculently.

"Why, Mr. Wilbur Farnham, of course—the Boston Farnhams, don't you remember? We met him at Newport early in the season. He's connected with a factory somewhere, I think, and he's an expert on something—I've forgotten just what. He—"

"You seem to approve of him!" Aunt Hettie said grimly.

Jane flushed a trifle.

"He's—er—nice, of course," she said more demurely.

Aunt Martha, absorbed in sciatic sensations of her own, nodded vaguely. Aunt Hettie rose abruptly.

"Since you've arranged to start at this ungodly hour, I suppose the other fools are waiting," she said graciously. "Goodby, Martha, for a day or two."

"Or more than that," Jane suggested. "We're not sure when we're coming back."

Aunt Martha gazed at her very significantly.

"You will have to be here next week for the settling of the estate, of course," was her reminder. "Meanwhile, call us on the long distance, dear, and if there is—er—any other reason for your returning, we can tell you."

Aunt Hettie had already started downstairs. Jane's high color faded suddenly.

"I'm not thinking about returning just now," she said; "I'm just thinking about getting away from Thompson. I'm never coming back here until he has been tried and sent to Sing Sing or some other big prison. And dear Aunt Martha, when he does appear, lock yourself in your room and don't breathe until they've overpowered him, will you?"

Mrs. Porter-Preston laughed and kissed her niece; and the niece, having glanced at the little clock, fled precipitately.

When she overtook Aunt Hettie, the elder lady was in the reception-room, examining Wilbur Farnham from his grin of amused surprise to his carefully shod feet. Jane's introduction she acknowledged with a brief nod and added an expressive sniff—and Dixon, pausing in the doorway to ask if the bags should be placed in the car, saved a rather painful moment.

Jane's own maid fluttered into sight, too, with her motor-coat and bonnet, permitting Farnham to assist her mistress while she herself persuaded Aunt Hettie to don the garment Aunt Martha had sent down, and thus, very shortly, they passed from the Porter-Preston mansion and paused on the steps to gaze at Jane's beloved new six.

As a camping outfit, the car bore every earmark of real business just now. Long canvas rolls were strapped on the off side—tents, apparently, and folding cots—and on the back a pair of big leather cases were secured. Mr. Farnham spoke his mind.

"It looks good to me!"

Jane dimpled quite happily again.

"It looks as if we could set up housekeeping wherever we liked, at any rate," she said.

"It ruins the lines of the car utterly," Aunt Hettie submitted. "That isn't your man Jones."

"That's my temporary man, Cragg," Jane laughed. "His profile isn't much for beauty, is it?"

Together they stared critically at Mr. Cragg's profile as, hands on the wheel, he looked stonily ahead.

It was no side-face to rouse an artist's soul; the square chin was too small and the nose retreated bashfully upward. Beyond this, Mr. Cragg's forehead sloped slightly backward under his cap, which was pulled too far down.

Still, he was there for utility rather than mere ornamentation and Jane led the way toward him and the journey on which he was to pilot them. She came to the side of the car and said:

"Cragg, call first at—"

And it was here that the strange, the unaccountable thing happened!

Cragg, turning briskly, faced her for the fraction of a second with a countenance that was all respectful attention. And on the second it seemed as if a physical blow had been dealt him!

Mr. Cragg bounced straight up from his seat and bounced down again. His ruddy cheeks went white; his rather deep-set eyes bulged momentarily from their sockets as he stared at Jane.

His hands, leaving the wheel, clutched the air as he drew them back convulsively; and then he shrank back, gazing still at Jane Fayre as a murderer might gaze at the specter of his victim!

"Er—aah!" said the unusual Cragg, by way of greeting.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAZY JOG.

IT was Farnham who said blankly:

"What on earth is wrong with the man?"

"I—I don't know," Jane faltered. "Did I startle him or—"

"What *is* the matter with you?" Mr. Farnham demanded, leaning over the arm of Cragg's seat and staring at him. "Sick?"

The driver swallowed audibly.

"I—ain't sick!" he replied hoarsely and forced a ghastly little smile as he dragged his eyes from Jane Fayre. "I ain't sick."

"Did I frighten you when I spoke?" Jane asked, wonderingly.

Once more the remarkable Cragg looked at her, meeting her eyes squarely for a moment, apparently searching her countenance for something and, to some degree, finding what he sought. He turned away and huddled farther down in his seat.

"Yes, ma'am, beg your pardon," he mumbled. "I'm—like that sometimes when anybody speaks sudden into that ear. It

got—got hurted when I was a kid. Where did you say to call?"

His teeth gritted strangely as he listened to Mary Callum's address and nodded and touched his cap, and it was not without some misgiving that Jane entered her car and watched him start. He seemed capable enough, though; the beautiful machine rolled forward with never a jar and Mr. Farnham, having attempted to seat himself at Jane's side and discovered that Aunt Hettie was moving into the place, settled elsewhere and smiled reassuringly at the puzzled girl.

"His ear's probably supersensitive from an injury—something like that," said he. "I've heard of such things. He drives well."

He drove, in fact, exceptionally well. He swirled around corners and wormed his way through the early traffic with an expert hand, and very shortly he stopped before the big Callum house.

Mary, ready and waiting, was escorted to the car by a butler, a footman and her maid, who stored away some twenty bits of luggage where they would roll most annoyingly when the car started and then stood away to permit Miss Mary to wave farewell to a pair of doting parents in a window.

She was a nice little thing, Jane reflected dubiously when they were under way once more. She was frail, of course, and lacked color in every possible way; and she had been pampered and thoroughly spoiled since the day of her birth; and when, on rare occasions, Mary spoke, it could not have been said that her words were actual pearls of wit and wisdom.

Her chronically delicate state, which necessitated much waiting upon and could have been cured forever by a season of golf and tennis, made it incumbent upon Mary's hostess to ask at regular intervals if she were *quite* comfortable, and in divers other ways Mary might have been considered a nuisance by the uncharitable.

But she was a nice little thing and, which was much more to the point, she was lending her presence to Jane's emergency party and helping to save that young woman from solitary flight with a strange chauffeur. Jane smiled quite fondly upon Mary as they came to the Hapworthy home.

In this establishment, as the hostess entered, there was a certain air of tension not wholly reassuring. She recognized its existence as the door closed; she began to sense underlying causes as Mr. and Mrs. James Hapworthy greeted her and hurried into their motoring togs.

The lady of the household bustled about with lips tightly compressed and a sinister glint in her rather hard eyes whenever she glanced at her husband. Mrs. Hapworthy was small, but one felt that she lacked nothing of force when dealing with her life-partner.

That gentleman, on the other hand, wandered about with a deprecatory smile, caressing his perfect little mustache and, once or twice, rolling his fascinating china-blue eyes in Jane's direction as if to apologize for the obvious temper of his lady and to hint that he at least was in no sense blamable.

"I was so glad to find that you were home and willing to come!" Jane said spasmodically.

Mrs. Hapworthy paused and permitted her eyes to flash at Jane.

"Yes, dear, we came home quite suddenly—day before yesterday," she explained.

"You meant to stay up in Vermont until October, didn't you?" Jane queried unfortunately.

Mrs. Hapworthy laughed unpleasantly.

"We should have stayed there, if conditions had been happier," she said. "It was a lovely little cottage, you know, and everything perfectly dear. But there was a blond woman—"

"Oh, my dear!" Hapworthy protested. "Norma, really you mustn't—"

"She heard my perfectly candid opinion of her—and *you're* here!" Mrs. Hapworthy said succinctly.

Mr. Hapworthy shrugged his shoulders and smiled self-conscious apology behind her back—and Jane caught her breath.

She had walked in upon a rather vulgar and tiresome family jar; more, she was taking it with her, and if one-half the reports of Mrs. Hapworthy's temper when thoroughly roused were true, they would be sitting upon a nicely primed dynamite bomb for some time to come.

And still, they, too, were helping to save Jane from the Thompson terror, and she said quickly:

"Oh, don't be so utterly silly, either of you. You're ready?"

The tight-lipped little lady surveyed Jane inscrutably.

"You won't mind letting Hapworthy ride with your driver?" she asked.

"Of course not."

"Then if the man himself doesn't object —come!"

She led the way to the car, greeting Mary Callum and Aunt Hettie effusively and smiling plain approval upon Mr. Farnham as they shook hands for the first time—a proceeding which, for no reason at all, both pleased and annoyed Jane Fayre. Mr. Hapworthy, who knew when to obey and when to argue, made his way inconspicuously to the front seat and, having bestowed a jovial and condescending word upon Cragg, lapsed into self-satisfied silence.

Cragg, watching Jane strangely from the corner of his eye, suppressed another start as she spoke directly to him again:

"We're going up the Hudson—to Albany, I suppose, for a beginning, and then somewhere in the woods."

"Will I—now, hit her up, lady?" Cragg asked in his queer mumble.

"He will not!" Aunt Hettie broke in. "I do not insist upon much, Jane, but in your own words this was to be a lazy jog."

"That, of course, Cragg," Jane smiled, a trifle wearily, as she settled back.

A stoic and untroubled soul may be quite immune from the contagion of "nerves," but for one who is already forcing a generous personal supply of the disease into the background exposure to similar cases is followed by swift and sure infection.

Hapworthy, for one, was far from comfortable. He shifted every minute or two and at intervals glanced about warily for an inspection of his wife.

New York was far behind them now, and still that lady, absorbed in her own thoughts, had uttered hardly half a dozen words! Lips still tightly compressed, she spent most of the time staring at nothing and, occasionally, nodding emphatically and plucking at a button of her coat.

Jane, unable to watch that particular guest any longer without shrieking, turned her attention to Mary Callum and was almost instantly sorry.

Mary, she gleaned, was accustomed to the certain make of shock-absorber favored by her papa; if there were shock-absorbers on Jane's car, it would't make those dreadful bumps. . . . Oh, were there? Then they couldn't be the same kind, because Mary's papa's car never made her head ache, while this one did.

Aunt Hettie, entering the mild discussion presently, gave it as her opinion that these particular shock-absorbers were worthless, but that Mary's head should not have ached in any case. Like Mary's pale cheek it denoted anæmia, which could be cured by hard exercise, ice-cold baths and plenty of good food; and Mary, wide-eyed, told Aunt Hettie that a blood sample, taken only recently, had showed that she was rich in something and only slightly deficient in something else—and there Jane turned away wearily and left them to argue it out as they chose.

Young Mr. Farnham, at least, was quite normal and doing his level best to inject a certain spirit of merriment into the gathering. He was a blessing just now, Jane reflected. Without him she would have been on the verge of a nervous collapse ere this.

He was good-natured and brilliant and a happy, strong character—all of which, by the way, she had understood within five minutes of meeting him, early in the summer—but no man can push a needle through the side of an armored cruiser, and even Farnham could not seem to raise the spirits of that company.

Eventually he limited himself to a few cheery comments on the scenery; and nervous terrors began to creep back upon Jane.

They were getting away from Thompson, but were they getting away with sufficient speed?

To one who had never met and married Thompson, it might have seemed that they were perfectly safe from pursuit; it did not seem so to Jane. Resistlessly, the memory of that dreadful visage crawled back from the secret past and the memory of his threats and his whole terrible mien.

When Thompson had threatened to follow her and find her, he had meant just that: he would find her!

And now, to her certain knowledge, he *was* after her! What had kept him in Batesford all this time she could not guess, unless he was a sort of local burglar who made his living in the one town, safe in the knowledge that none dared molest him—but he had left Batesford now.

By this time, according to his choice of trains, he was either in New York or somewhere along the road. He might even have left New York again and started in pursuit

of her; and without pausing to test the notion for possible pure absurdity, Jane leaned forward and spoke quietly to her chauffeur:

"Is the car working perfectly, Cragg?"

Cragg started violently.

"Yes, ma'am," said he. "There ain't anything better in the world than this six."

"You're used to driving faster than this?"

"Yes, ma'am," Cragg replied with a sickly smile.

"Do it!" his mistress directed briefly.

Her substitute driver may have had his odd points, but he knew how to obey; she was no more than settling back again when the big machine leaped forward like a live thing freed of its leash.

Farnham grinned and steadied himself. Mrs. Hapworthy struck the back of the seat so suddenly that for a minute or more sheer astonishment dispelled her sinister mood. Afterward the mood returned and she was silent as before—but Mary Callum and Aunt Hettie, screaming in unison, clutched each other; and then, as Aunt Hettie thrust the girl from her she cried:

"Has the man gone crazy?"

"I told him to do it," said Jane.

"Tell him to stop it!"

"We'll never get anywhere at that rate, aunt," Jane submitted. "You will not mind it after a minute or two."

"But I do mind! I—" Then Aunt Hettie said no more, for the car met a considerable bump and floated lightly over it and Aunt Hettie's words returned to her throat.

Jane herself took small account of the speed. They were tearing along now at something like forty-five miles an hour, roaring past fences, jumping the rough spots, swerving quite hair-raisingly as they whizzed past other cars and horse-drawn country vehicles, but the motion rather soothed her than otherwise.

If Thompson were somewhere behind, the distance between them was widening; beyond that nothing mattered.

They hurtled past a farm-wagon, missing it so narrowly that the driver stood erect and bawled words they could not hear but could almost see; and while Mary Callum covered her eyes and buried her snow-white face on Aunt Hettie's shoulder, while Aunt Hettie shook a threatening finger at Jane and spoke her mind loudly yet inaudibly, Jane smiled her apology, bent her head to the wind and thought on, this time taking a new path.

They were headed—whither? The rest of them, naturally but foolishly, assumed that she was conveying them to some definite and pleasurable spot; nothing could have been farther from the fact.

Mentally, Jane's eye examined the map of New York State. There were many localities that might be harboring Thompson; there was just one spot where he was *not!*

Again Jane leaned close to the driver's ear.

"Slow down; I want to talk to you," she said. "Just how many miles is this car good for in a day?"

Cragg's pale and peculiar grin half turned to her.

"All you want to get out of her, lady."

"You can get to Albany easily?"

"I'll take you out of it again two hours from now, if you say so, miss."

Jane nodded emphatically.

"Do it, then. Run up Schenectady way and then head for the woods."

"Yes, ma'am!" said Cragg, touching his cap as he steered the beautiful car with one hand.

"And if you can make Batesford before night, do it, if the car will hold together!" added his mistress, nervously. "Do you know where Batesford is—a little village?"

With a thud and a grind, the car stopped short! The strange chauffeur, whirling about, faced Jane with wide, wild eyes.

"Batesford!" said he.

"Do you—do you know the place?" Jane asked, drawing back from him suddenly as Farnham rose and moved to her side. "Whatever makes you glare like that, Cragg? Is it—"

Suddenly as he had turned upon her, Mr. Cragg relaxed again. His eyes dropped and his working lips were drawn together.

"I—I know where it is, lady," he choked. "We could never make it."

"Something's all wrong with you, my man," Farnham volunteered, curiously. "If you're not feeling fit to drive, be frank about it."

"I'm all right—it ain't me!" Cragg assured him hastily. "It's the car, boss. She could never make Batesford in one piece—never! Not in the shape she is. We're in great luck if I can get her as far as Albany and into the machine-shop."

"But you said—" Jane began blankly.

"I know what I said, lady, but I didn't want to worry you about the car while we were on the road. She's in awful shape—horrible shape! The transmission's grind-

ing something fierce; I think there's a nut in the gear-case or something like that. Then you can't get any speed out of this carbureter, you know, lady!"

"Every time I let her out," he rushed on, "this carbureter begins to—backfire. Once there, I thought she was going to blow back in the tank and burn up the whole shooting match. We could never get to Batesford!"

Unconsciously his sleeve wiped great beads of inexplicable perspiration from his dusty forehead. Aunt Hettie started up with real decision.

"The man knows best; he is a mechanic," said she. "We must turn back at once."

"Home?" gasped Jane.

"Most certainly!"

Hope flashed into Cragg's eyes and gratitude as well, as the eyes shot toward Aunt Hettie.

"That's right, lady," said he, with much enthusiasm. "Little old New York's the only place for this boat. Everybody in it's risking their lives, the way she is now."

Aunt Hettie shuddered, as did Mary Callum. Mr. Hapworthy seemed more than a little startled and, for the time, his wife looked at him almost without animosity and came near to speaking.

Young Mr. Farnham, regarding Jane with a puzzled smile, asked flatly:

"Does the car really need repairing, Miss Fayre?"

"How can it?" Jane said suddenly. "It was overhauled only three days ago and the man who brought it back from the shop said that there wasn't so much as a connection loose and that it ought to be good for ten thousand miles without ever lifting the bonnet again!"

"And yet this man—" Mr. Farnham began.

"He doesn't know what he's talking about!" the car's owner stated and frowned at Cragg, who dropped his eyes abruptly. "Engine and everything else is as perfect as it can be made. Cragg, have *you* any reason for wishing not to go ahead?" she asked sharply.

Their driver drew in his breath with a scared wheeze.

"No ma'am!" he said thickly. "Maybe —maybe this car might not be as bad as I thought."

"Is it bad at all?" Farnham snapped.

"We could probably get to Albany, boss," a faint voice conceded.

A sense of bewilderment was stealing over Jane.

"Then why don't you do it?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am, I will," said Cragg, with the utmost meekness and let in his clutch once more!

His shoulders hunched queerly as the car bounded north again. Jane gazed on their unaccountable dejection until Aunt Hettie, touching her arm, put her own thoughts into words.

"That man," Aunt Hettie declared, "is either drunk or crazy!"

"He isn't intoxicated," Farnham said softly. "I'm pretty sure of that."

"And he doesn't look crazy," Jane added tentatively.

"Possibly not, but he acts it to perfection," her aunt said sternly, and Mary Callum, whose eyes were round and frightened, nodded timorous assent. "Jane, the only thing to do is to make him stop and then wait here until another car comes along and is willing to tow us to some safe place—unless you can drive, Mr. Farnham?"

"I can't," that gentleman admitted.

"Because this poor soul may see a cliff and conceive the idea of running us all over the edge, or the water may excite him when we come in sight of the river again and—"

It was Aunt Hettie's final utterance before reaching the capital city of Albany.

Whatever uncanny mental processes were going forward inside Mr. Cragg's bullet cranium, they seemed to reach a climax just then. He nodded suddenly and his foot moved over to the accelerator pedal.

Jane's superb six-cylinder toy, rising gaily from the road, essayed a swift flight through several yards of plain, unsubstantial air, came to earth again with a light bound, took a better grip with its whirling tires, lifted its voice in one long roar and departed from that particular section of the landscape!

Jane, looking over the huddle that was James Hapworthy, observed that the speedometer lingered at 55 miles an hour and wondered whether the instrument had broken down. They were making more than that, of course; they must be doing seventy or eighty miles now and, except for Farnham, who grinned, Jane's guests on the lazy jog crouched low and made neither sound nor motion.

For her own part, the speed was anything but unwelcome. If Thompson were behind them now, he could never be riding

in anything like this—unless the burglar business had gained him a fortune.

Almost comfortably she watched Cragg flirt with death and wondered whether she was glad to have him with them or otherwise; he was perhaps the most eccentric person she had ever met, but he seemed able to propel this splendid vehicle at a pace Jones never would have attempted. And every mile that brought them nearer to Batesford, brought Jane that much nearer to safety.

Skirting them to right or left, Mr. Cragg avoided towns with hardly a drop on the speedometer. Cap pulled down, chin pulled in, oblivious to everything but the road ahead, Cragg's whole being had concentrated on this task of getting to Albany; she felt that he would get there safely and, once they paused, once the party regained breath and voiced its several sentiments—what then?

It was a day of unfortunate thoughts for Jane; another of them came promptly. Travel as one chose from Batesford to New York, one changed cars at Albany almost invariably.

Suppose Thompson had started later than the man Boggs had assumed? Suppose he had reached Albany this morning and found that he must wait over for his New York train?

He was a nervous, alert citizen, this Thompson; he would never buy a paper and sit peacefully in the station waiting-room, like a normal man. Scant though her opportunity had been to make an exhaustive study of Thompson's character, Jane felt that, delayed in Albany, he would lurch forth and wander about, peering wickedly at the unoffending Albanians, until traintime came again.

And since nine thousand dollars' worth of automobile is not the least conspicuous thing, even in a city, it were well that their party spent no undue amount of time about Albany. The hostess of the lazy tour nodded to herself, looked around, surprised young Mr. Farnham in quite rapt contemplation of her profile, flushed a trifle and realized that not only had they slowed down, but that they were actually in the city limits.

Cragg turned, avoiding her eye, and spoke dust-choked words from a wind-dried throat:

"I gotter take her to the garage, lady!"

"Why?"

"I gotter get her over a pit where I can have a look underneath," the chauffeur said firmly. "She's held together fine so far, but there's some little thing wrong and I don't want to take a chance."

"Run *into* the garage," Jane said, briefly.

Her driver nodded quick assent and drove on; Jane, mustering a bright smile, examined her happy little party.

Mr. Hapworthy, blinking his way back to full consciousness, was trying to delude himself by murmuring: "Rippin'! Rippin'! Although I should have preferred to go a bit faster than that!"

His spouse, Aunt Hettie and Mary Callum, grouped on the back seat, seemed in a state of semi-anesthesia; dazedly they looked at each other and at Jane, gasping and gathering stray hair and tucking it out of sight. But they were all alive and unharmed and Jane's gaze, roving the street and finding it pleasantly free of Thompsons, grew even brighter as they rolled straight uphill and into a garage apparently familiar to Cragg.

It was a mighty place, built on a corner and with an entrance on either street, and having come to a standstill within Cragg stepped down briskly, ignored the grease-smeared gentleman who approached him and addressed Jane directly.

"I guess you could all get out now and walk around a bit, if you like," said he. "I'll be right back."

"Where are you going?"

"Just to the machine-shop to get some tools," said Mr. Cragg, with a quick smile and, touching his cap, crossed the place and passed into a corridor.

He was a small, swift-moving body. Farnham, who was assisting the slowly reviving ladies from the car, paid no attention to his going, but Mr. Hapworthy stared after Cragg and caressed his small mustache. Further, Mr. Hapworthy frowned thoughtfully and turned to Jane with:

"Why did he carry out that little bag under his duster?"

"Did he carry a bag?"

"Little cheap imitation leather affair that looked as if it might belong to him; I saw him sneak it under his coat and wondered. Just a minute!" said Mr. Hapworthy, as he darted in the direction Cragg had taken.

Ten seconds or so he remained invisible; then Mr. Hapworthy raced excitedly into view again and dashed at the opposite corridor.

"I'll get him! I'll head him off!" he called in passing. "He's running around the corner like a madman, but—"

The other corridor swallowed Mr. Hapworthy.

CHAPTER V.

SHOCK AND A WARNING.

LIPS parted, Jane gazed after her blue-eyed guest as he leaped jauntily from her vision. Farnham hurried to her side with:

"What did he say?"

"That Cragg was running down the street like a madman, I think."

"Why?"

"Why should he all but faint at the sight of me and later decide that the car was coming to pieces and then decide that it wasn't—and all the rest of it?" Jane asked, stepping down. "I don't know. He's an unusual character, isn't he?"

Mr. Farnham nodded briefly.

"Rather too unusual to be driving a car that's carrying you—er—women, I mean," he said. "It might be as well to let him run himself out and get somebody else to operate the car, or—ah, Hapworthy caught him."

Hapworthy had. Quite breathless, but vastly satisfied with his performance, Mr. Hapworthy appeared, leading Cragg toward them from the entrance of the corridor, a firm grip on the chauffeur's arm.

The latter was breathless, too, but far from self-satisfied; a grim, gloomy mood had apparently overtaken him. His head drooped and he walked sullenly; but as his eye met Jane's across the place, he straightened up and personified injured innocence.

Farnham snorted.

"Did he steal that grip from you?" he muttered.

"It's his own, I think," said Jane.

"And I think—pardon me—that he's going to try putting something over on you because you're a woman. Do you want me to find out what ails him?"

"Would you?" Jane asked gratefully.

"Watch me," smiled Mr. Farnham.

Mr. Hapworthy stopped before them with his captive and permitted his eyes to roll in Jane's direction.

"Here's your man," he announced. "He was making about sixty miles an hour on foot, but I got him and brought him back."

"Were you leaving us, Cragg?" Mr. Farnham asked crisply; and if he had expected to jar Mr. Cragg he failed dismally, for that gentleman, evidently relieved that he might turn his back on Jane Fayre, looked up from his lesser altitude rather defiantly.

"Why would I leave?" he inquired.

"Mr. Hapworthy says that you were running?"

"Certainly I was running," their unusual driver responded readily. "Why would I keep you people waiting any longer than I had to?"

"Waiting for what, Cragg?"

"To get the car fixed," Mr. Cragg said, facing him with no trace of the perturbation that had marked his every word to Jane. "I was going after a wrench—that's all. A special kind of wrench you have to use on this car." He even smiled. "I was hustling as fast as I could, and this gentleman rushes out and grabs me like I was a crook."

"Yes, but how about the bag you're carrying?"

"Always keep that with me, boss. There's a lot of little things in there I wouldn't want to leave lying around a garage—keepsakes and so on. . . . Can I go after the wrench now?"

The mechanic who had first advanced was near them now; he smiled oddly.

"What sort of wrench was this?" he asked.

"You've got all sorts here, I take it?" Mr. Farnham suggested.

"Every kind that was ever made, I guess."

Mr. Cragg turned upon him with a smile that was at once bland, brazen and child-like.

"Why, I didn't know that!" said he. "I understood that you folks had almost no machine shop here."

And he shrugged his shoulders and relaxed, plainly relieved to find the establishment so well equipped. Mr. Farnham, having considered him for a moment with a cynical smile, turned his attention to Jane, frowned at what he saw and led her aside.

"Please don't look so puzzled and worried," he said. "A girl like you never should have attempted a party like this, but if you'll just leave things to me we'll get no end of fun out of it before we're through."

"Do you—think so?" Jane smiled, almost wistfully.

"I know it!" the young man said heart-

ily. "As to this freak, he may be telling the truth and he may not, but—is he worth bothering with? He seems to have something on his mind besides running the car. Do you want to keep him or shall we get another driver?"

"Well, Jones vouched for him as one of the very few men able to handle the car properly," Jane sighed.

"That settles it, then; we'll keep him and bring him down to business. Cragg!"

"Yes, sir?" their driver said mildly.

"Get about your repairing—or no! Don't get about it," Mr. Farnham corrected, turning to the mechanic. "It might be better if you'd look this engine over and try out the whole machine. Our man seems to think there's something wrong."

He of the overalls ceased chuckling and quickened.

"We've got a man here that worked in the factory where they build this car," he said. "Just a minute, sir, and I'll get him."

He hurried off and Farnham took to whistling very softly through his teeth as he gazed down upon Cragg—who, curiously, seemed quite at ease again and satisfied with the situation. Mr. Farnham's attention wandered back to Jane, but Jane was sinking deep into rather pleasant thoughts of her own.

The feeling that Mr. Farnham had lifted some of the burden from her shoulders was strangely soothing. Not more than two minutes ago she had been conscious of a weak desire to weep softly over things in general; now she was growing steadily more cheerful.

Since he had assumed so much of her load, she wished that young Mr. Farnham knew the full extent of her trouble and would help her share it—and almost instantly she shuddered and breathed a fervent, silent prayer that he might never discover a single detail! Not, of course, that Mr. Farnham mattered more than any one else, but he might have failed to understand—just as any one else might have failed.

Jane sighed comfortably, stole a rather shy glance in Mr. Farnham's direction, discovered that he was looking at her thoughtfully and lowered her eyes again.

"—better to wait here than walk," Aunt Hettie was saying tartly, somewhere outside Jane's dreamy mood. "If the thing is really in running order, we'll get to a hotel, have something tasty cooked up—it must be hours past their luncheon time—and then rest!"

Jane smiled again. After all, much as she had wished to run away from Albany, it might be safe enough to spend the night here if she herself kept out of sight; it might, in fact, be the only possible course, for within the realm of possibility lay the splendid chance of her three female guests refusing flatly to travel another mile.

And so long as Mr. Farnham was within hailing distance—again Jane sighed comfortably and then:

"Well, where *is* John Thompson?" bawled suddenly through the echoing reaches of the lower floor.

As if a dagger had pierced her, Jane started. One instant she fancied that the words had been pure imagination—some brain-trick born of her secret worries.

But in another she turned icy from head to foot, for the words came again and the mechanic was responsible for them. A frown upon his well-smudged face, he stood there impatiently, all unaware that he had just frozen solid one tender human thing.

From behind a distant car a voice answered:

"Thompson was on the top floor when I came down."

"Just a minute, sir, and I'll phone up for him," the man in overalls said to Mr. Farnham.

He vanished through an office door and Farnham went on with his whistling, for he had no means of knowing that the girl beside him was about to drop stone dead from plain, old-fashioned fright!

Her soft smile persisted, strangely transfixed at the second she had caught the dreadful words; she was aware of its presence and wondered dizzily at its persistence; and straightway she forgot it, for the man in overalls was back again and saying cheerily:

"Thompson'll be right down, sir. Y' see, John used to work in their factory."

It was not only Thompson, but John as well. For a wee space Jane had all but persuaded herself that she had been mistaken in the John—that it must of course be some other Thompson, because the individual she had married would hardly stoop to honest work.

A ghastly calm descended upon Jane. In her mind's feverishly keen eye she could see it all, down to the last horrid item. This was inescapable Fate, the same Fate that

had led her to the window of the house next door for a final glimpse of the burglar. There was no avoiding it, and, at least, it would soon be over.

For the elevator cables were rattling and Thompson was coming down now!

Jane tried to move nearer to Farnham and could raise neither foot. She smiled and noted ever so mistily that Cragg had succumbed to another of his many moods and wondered why.

Mr. Cragg, who had so recently sent his brazen smile to the four corners of the place, had flattened himself against a car. One arm clutched his little grip; the other hand clutched the bosom of his duster rather dramatically. His eyes, which had stared impudently at everything but Jane, were dilated and wild again; he was peering about, at the doors, at the cars, at the elevator; he dragged at his throat and seemed about to faint.

But he would forget himself presently in witnessing her end, Jane reflected, sickened. The tragedy was just about one second in the future now; with the elevator humming slowly downward, clearer understanding of its underlying causes came to her.

The burglar business had been bad and Thompson's capital had carried him only to Albany; here, perforce, he had paused and worked honestly for one day, by way of raising his fare to New York. Such a necessity, very likely, had rendered his frightful nature even more ugly; his legs would appear now and then the rest of Thompson; he would look about with his evil eyes and the eyes would light upon Jane. Then, with a hair-raising shout, John Thompson would leap from the elevator and straight at her!

He would—Jane closed her eyes. There was the elevator and there were the legs!

The elevator stopped with a thud. Said the man in overalls:

"This car here, John!"

Jane ceased breathing. One second spent a week or so in passing; another dragged through the ensuing month. She felt herself swaying and knew that she was about to drop senseless before he could touch her. She was glad of that, but—Jane opened her eyes again quite abruptly, for from Cragg's direction a distinctly wild and irresponsible laugh had split the calm of the establishment.

All of Mr. Cragg's agitation was gone. He had ceased to clutch himself and was leaning limply against the side of the car; his mouth was open and he laughed; and then, since they had all turned in his direction, he ceased laughing with a jerk and mopped his forehead!

"Where do you want to take her, Thompson?" the man in overalls asked.

"Why, she'll do right here, I guess," responded a thin, small, apologetic voice.

Within Jane's chilled bosom the heart leaped back to life so suddenly that her temples pounded. She gripped Mr. Farnham quite involuntarily and forced her eyes upon the beautiful six—and the person who bent over the engine was no more than five feet tall, with sandy hair and a bedraggled yellow mustache and steel-rimmed spectacles!

"I'm going to keep a mighty sharp eye on that Cragg chap!" Mr. Farnham said, decidedly. "He's mad as a hatter!"

Jane hardly heard him. Her clawing hand, to be sure, dropped from Farnham's strong arm, but her whole being was centered on the John Thompson who was not the John Thompson she feared at all. Breathing noisily the little man had mostly disappeared under the uplifted hood, while the other mechanic shifted an electric bulb from side to side of the engine as he directed.

Now he grunted, now he asked a question or twisted with a wrench—and as he grunted and twisted, good, cold common sense surged back to Jane Fayre.

She was permitting this Thompson idea to become a positive obsession; and that exaggerated state of mind would have to end here and now. One more false alarm like this one and it was far from impossible that she would collapse utterly. Jane then, waving away hysteria, smiled quite naturally as the honest representative of the Thompson family straightened up and said:

"There ain't nothing wrong with this car."

"Nothing at all?" Farnham asked.

"Not a thing, mister. She's like a watch. She's been overhauled within a week from the looks of her."

"What have you got to say about it, Cragg?" the large young man inquired sharply.

Cragg faced him without flinching.

"Only that I musta been mistaken, boss, an' I'm glad of it, now this here expert mechanic says so," he replied. "It seemed to me like there was a little tick somewhere—

some little thing hitting off—but so long as there ain't, why, so much the better."

He bowed apologetically and gazed at the engine himself with calm, professional interest; and while it seemed that Farnham would have said more, Aunt Hettie's incisive tone spared him the trouble.

"Jane!" said she, "we are now going to put up at a hotel!"

"I'm willing," Jane smiled.

"And whether we are to remain here a day or two and recuperate from that dreadful experience I shall decide later," Aunt Hettie pursued firmly. "We'll lunch first and then see whether they've anything presentable to offer in the way of rooms. Pay the man, Jane, and let us start."

"I'll settle with them," Farnham smiled. "You get in and make yourself comfortable, Miss Fayre. You look done up."

His hostess obeyed submissively, aware that her appearance did not belie her inward sensations. The last shock had left her rather numb, and she settled back and smiled faintly as the car rolled out to the afternoon sunshine again with Cragg at the wheel.

But on one point she was wholly determined: come what might and barring the actual appearance of the worst John Thompson on earth, she would not weaken like that again! If the effort exhausted her, she would still that fluttering heart and down the jangling nerves, forcing herself to resemble in some degree a conventional hostess.

Thus the Jane who swept into the hotel dining-room at the head of her shaken and wind-blown party was outwardly quite herself.

At that hour the big place was soothingly still and altogether empty of guests. Waiters, having nothing else to occupy them, swarmed about the round table.

Silver rattled invitingly, ice tinkled sanely in their glasses and the menu held not a suggestion of murder or pursuit.

Jane smiled up at Mr. Farnham, as he followed alone after a minute.

"Since you want to keep that man, I've arranged to leave him in sight," he grinned.

"Where?"

"Just outside our window here. See him? He was quite anxious to go to some little restaurant conducted by his cousin, I believe, but I told him to back down there and stay."

Jane nodded and glanced out. There at the curb Cragg seemed, temporarily at any rate, in a perfectly passive state.

He sat behind his wheel smoking a cigarette and gazing ahead; it occurred to his mistress that perhaps, in her lately excited state, the half of Cragg's peculiarities had been born in her own imagination. Jane, therefore, laughed almost lightly and left the task of ordering to Mr. Farnham.

He executed it exquisitely, rousing sudden visions of real food within Jane as he talked to the head waiter with the right-angled anatomy. She had not suspected it when they entered, but she was hungry; and, examining the rest of them with rather conscience-stricken eyes, she discovered that none of her party was shrinking visibly from the prospect of luncheon.

They would have to remain until to-morrow, of course. Personally, she would have preferred running another twenty miles into the country and selecting a camp-site, but the ladies of her party seemed rather too far gone.

And—so Jane informed herself when delicious, steaming soup appeared before them—there was no real danger. She would ask Farnham to omit her name when registering and that was really all the precaution that need be taken.

Jane smiled at her soup and felt eagerly for the spoon. And through the dining-room came a chubby-faced little boy in livery.

"Miss Fayre!" said he, loudly. "Miss Fayre! Miss Jane Fayre!"

The spoon dropped noisily. Not of course, that Jane was nervous, for she had done with all that, but——

"Miss Fayre!" the boy repeated insistently. "Miss Fayre!"

"Here!" said Mr. Farnham, indicating Jane.

The boy paused abruptly.

"Is that your car outside, Miss Fayre?" he asked.

Jane, strangely unable to speak past the constriction in her throat, merely nodded.

"Well, you don't want to go any farther!" the child announced with a grin.

"Eh?" Farnham put in.

"Nossir!" said the boy, glancing at the slip in his hand. "Somebody's telephoned to stop a car with that license number and hold it and tell Miss Fayre not to go any farther."

"This message came from whom?" Jane asked, with a strange, unearthly little smile.

"I dunno, miss," said the boy. "The clerk just told me to page the place for you and say that the party who telephoned said not to go any farther in the car, but to stay here if you were here. I dunno who it was."

But Jane—whiter than the snowy tablecloth and less able to move than the table itself—Jane knew! It was Thompson!

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST CRIME.

THE liveried lad, having done his full duty and waited a few fruitless seconds for evidences of its appreciation, bowed politely and moved on again. Mrs. James Hapworthy, rousing from deep broodings, called sharply:

"Boy, are you sure that a *man* telephoned?"

"I ain't sure, ma'am—only what the clerk said."

"Are you sure that it was Miss Fayre herself or was it some other member of her party?"

The boy stared at her and scratched his head.

"I couldn't say," he muttered. "I suppose it was Miss Fayre, lady, but—"

Mrs. Hapworthy turned slowly back to her husband, her bosom heaving and her eyes snapping; very carefully she examined him, and he flushed annoyedly and smiled his deprecating smile.

Mr. Farnham, turning impatiently from a glance at her, looked keenly at Jane. Mary Callum, viewing the matter from her own angle, cried suddenly and happily:

"Oh, our trip is spoiled! Our lovely trip is ruined!"

"Why?" Jane managed.

"Why, if you've been called home, dear, we couldn't think of going on without you and—"

Aunt Hettie sniffed.

"That isn't a message from home," she said significantly—so significantly, indeed, that all Jane's attention went to her. "That telephone call came from a man who is very anxious to talk with Jane!"

"Oh—who?" escaped the hostess.

Aunt Hetty surveyed her with gloomy triumph.

"You're registered as the owner of the car?" she said. "I knew he had the license numbers; I saw him taking them down. His little red bread wagon was standing in front of a house, just outside of Hudson. Your chauffeur never looked back, but I did. We smashed that wagon into flinders!"

In her sudden relief Jane laughed quite hysterically, because she had fancied for a moment that Aunt Hettie knew the truth and was about to lay it bare; and Farnham, catching the hysterical note, frowned and asked:

"Were you expecting a message of any sort, Miss Fayre?"

"I—no! No!"

"I'm sure that it is nothing serious," Mr. Farnham rose suddenly. "I'll go and get the details from the clerk. The boy very likely forgot more than half of what they told him to say."

He moved briskly from the room and disappeared in the direction of the office. Jane, despite the theory of the red bread wagon, upon which Aunt Hettie was enlarging with such melancholy gusto, shut her teeth and sat back silently to wait for further tidings.

Mr. Farnham, of course, would learn nothing at all. A gentleman of Thompson's keen criminal intelligence, telephoning with Thompson's fell intent, would hardly give his name and his reasons; in fact, as Jane saw but too clearly, Thompson was relying on the mysterious absence of any name to serve his purpose.

All he wished, now that he had gained a clue to Jane's flight, was to delay her until he could catch up . . . and then, on the other hand, Mr. Farnham might learn everything there was to learn.

Jane glared toward the door for an instant and wondered why he did not return; he must have been gone fully fifteen minutes now. And it was quite possible that the telephoning Thompson had held the wire in the hope that Jane might try to converse with the sender of the message; perhaps that was why Mr. Farnham tarried so long. Perhaps he was talking to Thompson now and—

"You'll excuse me for just a minute?" she said, rising suddenly with what was intended for a bright, apologetic little smile. "Perhaps I can help Mr. Farnham piece together the mystery."

"If there's anything I can do—" Mr. Hapworthy began eagerly, rising in his turn.

"There is nothing that you can do!" his wife informed him. "Permit Miss Fayre to attend to her own concerns."

Jane had fled. Keeping her swift walk from turning into a headlong run was something of an effort, but she succeeded, albeit she gave a drowsy waiter by the doorway an impression that the place was afire. Eyes darting about eagerly, she attained the lobby and there she collided with young Mr. Farnham, who was returning.

"Well?" Jane asked eagerly.

Mr. Farnham eyed her narrowly.

"You're excited!" he said.

"What was the message?"

"There wasn't any—or none to amount to anything," Mr. Farnham spoke quietly. "Let us sit down here in the corner for a minute or two, Miss Fayre."

His tone was remarkably deep and calming, too, as he smiled at his agitated hostess.

"Some one called up to learn if a car with your number had stopped at the house—that was all. The clerk says that it was a man's voice and that he was shouting; there's nothing unusual in that, you know, because people usually shout when they're talking over the long-distance wire. This call came from New York, I believe. Whoever it may have been, he wanted Miss Fayre to remain here until he came."

"And that was all?" Jane cried.

"Of course it was all. What were you expecting?"

"Why—nothing! Nothing at all!" his hostess said breathlessly.

And then, for no obvious reason, Mr. Farnham seemed to have taken her hand; he was pressing it reassuringly as he said very softly:

"You will forgive me, Miss Fayre, but I want to help you. There is something on your mind that is all but worrying you to death!"

"Why do you say that?" Jane asked faintly.

"Because I can see it, of course," Farnham smiled. "All the rest of them could see it if they were not so occupied with themselves. I know that it is presuming a good deal on short acquaintance, but if you will tell me all about it I'll do anything in this wide world to help you and make things easier for you, whatever the trouble may be."

He waited, but without reward. Jane's lips, to be sure, opened suddenly, but they closed again with a frightened little gasp; mad though it might be, Jane had tottered upon the very verge of pouring the whole story into Mr. Farnham's ear!

More than a little startled by the realization, she shrank from him and freed her hand, and Farnham reddened slowly as she sat in perfect silence, biting her lips.

"I beg your—your pardon," he stammered. "I didn't mean—"

"It isn't that. You can't understand," Jane said, looking up swiftly. "You can't understand how much I appreciate your goodness or how—much I want to tell you and ask you to help me. But it is impossible."

"Why?"

"Because it is!" Jane answered miserably. "That is all I can say."

Mr. Farnham smiled slowly.

"Let that be enough then," he said. "Tell me how I can help you. Tell me what you are afraid of—because it's plain fear, you know. Is it that somebody is following us? I know that sounds ridiculous, but—"

"But it isn't ridiculous!" Jane protested warmly. "I'm glad you've guessed that much!"

"And you want to get away from them?"

"That," said his hostess, with the utmost candor, "is the whole idea of this trip."

"Gives it that much more spice, for me at any rate," the helpful person chuckled. "And I wish you wouldn't tremble like that every few minutes," he added suddenly. "I may not run much to brains, but I'm stronger than an ox. Nothing's going to happen to you, Miss Fayre, while I'm in the neighborhood—and I shall be right there until you're back in your own home, with your permission."

"You have it!" said Jane, with deep feeling. "And I do thank you! And now—"

"Well?"

"How soon can we get out of town?"

"If you're really nervous about it, we can leave without finishing luncheon."

"They'll spend an hour or more at that table," Jane murmured heartlessly.

"They're figuring on spending the night here, too," the helpful one grinned, "but that needn't matter. There's food enough in that camp stuff of Weston's to provision an army, and he has a great reputation for exquisite taste in tents."

Jane shook her head.

"I'm afraid that we're here for an hour or two at least," she sighed shakily. "The others might be willing to start for politeness' sake, even if they thought me crazy, but Aunt Hettie would never consent."

"And still," said Mr. Farnham, smiling pensively at an artificial palm, "there must be a way out of that. She detests—somebody?"

"Nearly everybody," Jane admitted.

"I know, but what's the name of her particular pet aversion—the family she would rather shoot that meet? Most of us have one or two of 'em."

"Why—the Gestlings, I suppose," Jane said uncertainly.

"The Peter Gestlings?"

"Yes."

"I don't blame her much," grinned Mr. Farnham, rising. "Let's go back now."

He led the way to the dining-room, smiling serenely upon Jane as the head waiter bowed her ceremoniously back to her chair.

His smile broadened cheerfully as he returned to his own place. An infinitesimal second he gazed straight at Jane and then:

"Well, we probed to the bottom of the mysterious message," announced Mr. Farnham. "We are to have company on the trip."

"Ah?" said Hapworthy.

"Some people coming up behind in another car," Farnham went on carelessly.

Aunt Hettie glanced sharply at him.

"What people?"

"That's where the mystery comes in," Farnham chuckled. "Friends of somebody here, apparently, or they wouldn't have known the route and invited themselves along, but they couldn't quite get the name. Guest—Gessler—something like that. Miss Fayre thought it must be Gestling. The fellow's first name was Peter, anyway."

Thereupon he turned his whole attention to the activities of the waiter corps, which was bringing covered dishes and bustling over them on side tables. The chaperon of the party, quite ignoring her own portion, breathed rather more rapidly for several silent minutes; until, just as Mr. Farnham was regarding her with plain disappointment, she came to the surface with:

"Where are these people?"

"Oh, the suspense will soon be over," Mr. Farnham smiled. "They can't be more than ten or fifteen minutes behind now. Do *you* know who they are?"

Aunt Hettie laid aside her fork.

"I have a painfully clear idea," said she. "They are people who have thrust themselves upon me incessantly these last five years. I should no more think of enduring them on a trip of this character—"

She ended with a disgusted sniff. Mr. Farnham smiled blandly upon the fruit of his mendacity.

"I understand," he said sympathetically. "Do you want to run from them?"

"Not before we finish luncheon!" Mr. Hapworthy said, and took to eating more rapidly.

"Whenever Miss Fayre or her aunt wish to go," corrected his spouse.

Aunt Hettie drew her motor-coat about her.

"I am sorry," she said firmly, "as much for my own sake as for that of the rest of you, but I insist on getting out of sight within five minutes. Finish this course and let the rest of it go; and with the help of Providence we'll be out of Albany before they can find us. I will not—positively will not!—tolerate their company!"

"Go again—in the car—to-day?" Mary Callum asked weakly, dropping back in her chair. "Without even finishing luncheon and resting an hour or two?"

Aunt Hettie rose abruptly.

"Starvation is better than being bored to death," said she. "I will wait in the car. Hurry, please."

"And, anyhow, we started out to camp," Mr. Farnham said blandly. "It'll be ever so much more fun to sleep in the woods than in stuffy rooms. I'm ready when the rest are."

The five minutes had not expired when the silent company filed after Aunt Hettie. For an instant Mr. Farnham detained Jane Fayre.

"For your sake," he said gravely, "I lied."

"I'm sorry that you had to lie," Jane murmured.

"But considering the lightning results, I guess it was worth it," the helpful one added warmly, "and what is more, if it becomes necessary for me to lie again—"

"I hope it isn't; I don't like to have you lie," his hostess said.

Mr. Farnham gazed down on her meditatively.

"Consider me anchored to the cold truth for the rest of my life," said he. "Hereafter brute force will have to do whatever is necessary. What was the name of the town you told Cragg to head for?"

"Batesford."

"I'll wind him up and start him going," murmured Mr. Farnham, and approached the chauffeur with: "Tanks filled?"

"I filled 'em at the garage."

"Get into motion, then. Can you make Batesford to-night?"

"Well, boss," Mr. Cragg protested, "do you know that town's a hundred and seventy miles from here and no State roads on the last half of it—and it ain't more than three or four hours to dark."

"Obviously, then, you can't make Batesford without running most of the night," Mr. Farnham admitted. "Get as near to it as you can and—well, presently, when we find a likely-looking spot, we'll camp. And use some speed, Cragg. That's all."

Mr. Cragg turned upon him.

"Well, when do I eat?" he asked pointedly.

"You don't eat, for a while at any rate," Farnham explained impatiently. "Nobody eats much on this trip until we make camp. Now start her going."

The mighty six, its engine not even cooled from the last lightning dash, whirred into life again. Cragg, having glanced over his shoulder at Jane and glanced back again more swiftly as he met her emphatic little nod, sighed and pointed the car uphill and out of Albany.

Once more they bowled into open country, not quite so frantically as before, but fast enough to draw an occasional yell of protest from humbler vehicles. Farnham, resuming an occupation in which since early morning he had been taking increasing interest, returned to the study of Jane's lovely profile. Except for Aunt Hettie's occasional snort as she glanced backward, silence fell upon the car again.

Visibly, at any rate, they were not pursued, and from Jane's agitated viewpoint that was the main consideration. By this time, very likely, the Hapworthys and Mary were gaining the impression that somebody was slightly insane, later on, when they and Aunt Hettie came to understand that there was no detested Gestling family behind, when their several intelligences pieced together the deception—ah, well, even that did not matter very much. There might be unpleasantness, but so long as it did not include Thompson it would not be beyond Jane's endurance.

Two long hours they had been rushing and roaring along highways, skirting villages and bowling through towns, when the hamlet of Drayton appeared.

It was no more than a collection of trim little houses, with a factory of some sort in the background, a post-office, a doctor and a general store; but on the outskirts a progressive soul had built a very tidy concrete garage, near to the railway station and the freight yard—and it was a man hurrying from the garage holding up a commanding hand who stopped the car.

Cragg at least seemed to understand; they had been speeding and, according to the garage man's foolish idea, they were to pause here until a constable could hurry up and fine them twenty-five dollars.

His engine running softly, Mr. Cragg eyed the stranger with a grim smile, estimating the distance to the roof of the garage and preparing to send him hurtling thither at the first threat. But the stranger merely examined the license tags and then stepped to the side of the car with a pleasant:

"I was afraid you folks had gone around by the river road."

Farnham smiled inquiringly at him as he asked:

"What prompted this fear, friend?"

"Well, if this is Miss Fayre's party, there was a telephone message sent on here to have it stopped. Somebody's coming up, behind, I think. I didn't quite get it; the boy was here alone and took the message."

"When?" Jane asked breathlessly.

"I guess about an hour ago, lady."

"And the name of the person who telephoned?" Aunt Hettie put in.

"Well, if he gave a name, I'm afraid the kid didn't get it," the garage keeper said apologetically. "He just said that it was a man calling and he was mad and said he'd been telephoning all over New York State and that if we caught you, not to let you go on under any circumstances. Seems to me he said he'd had track of you in Albany and you'd gone on again. Was you in Albany to-day?"

"Where did the call come from?" Jane asked.

"I couldn't tell you that, either," the stranger sighed. "Y' see, this kid ain't as bright as he might be; I just sorter hire him to help out his mother. She's a widder and he had scarlet fever or something last winter and it sorter affected his memory. I've told her time and again—"

The unfortunate's history was lost in the deep gaze that passed between Mr. Farnham and his hostess; the former tapped Mr. Cragg's shoulder abruptly.

"Go on!" he ordered.

"Yes, but this telephone message said"—

the garage man began blankly, and then stepped aside briskly as the car shot headlong across the bridge, over the railroad tracks and thundered straight on up hill.

Later—and only miles and miles later, when the sun had vanished behind the black hills and Cragg had been forced to slow down upon a particularly bad patch of road—Aunt Hettie found voice to say oddly:

"It seems almost impossible that the Gestling tribe should go to such lengths!"

"Yes," said Mary Callum, "because—"

Impolitely, Mr. Farnham interrupted with a crash.

"I'll tell you," he said. "I've been thinking the thing over as we ran and, whoever it may be that is trying to join us, we don't want them. If it was any one who knew that they'd be welcome, they'd have given their names and their message and all the rest of it. As it is, we'll fool 'em!"

"Fool them?" Jane echoed.

"If they're keeping the telephone wires hot, we're likely enough to be held up in every village we pass—or a car with our license number is, at any rate. The answer is simple," beamed Mr. Farnham. "We'll change the license number."

Cragg half turned.

"That's a crime, boss!" he announced.

"Is it?" said Farnham. "Then stop the car and we'll commit a crime."

"Do you know what they can do to you for using a false number?" Cragg asked.

"No, but I can stand it, whatever it is," grinned the helpful person. "You unscrew the confounded tags, Cragg. Where's some pasteboard about the same size?"

Cragg descended gloomily and opened his toolbox.

"There's boxes that the inner tubes came in, under the seat," he said. "They might do."

"And if we're caught at this stunt—" Hapworthy began anxiously.

"I'll confess and go to the gallows with a smile on my lips, Happy," said Mr. Farnham. "Get up. I think they must be under you."

Grinning, his fountain-pen was out even before Mr. Hapworthy had passed him the pasteboard boxes. Grinning still, Mr. Farnham considered their own number critically, pondered a moment and then scratched busily. Until:

"There!" he said. "G 1200—that's distinctly different. Put that one on the back, Cragg, while I make another for the front."

Again the pen scratched, while Mary Callum asked timidly whether, in the event of somebody's arrest, the others would be held as material witnesses; and if so held, whether they could be admitted to bail; and, this being possible, whether her father's property, which was all in New York City, would serve as security in this wild and remote section of the State. Mary had relapsed into frightened silence and Aunt Hettie was just tuning up for a discourse on the improbability of a Gestling pursuit and the likelihood that the vengeful man of the red bread wagon was following them after all, when Mr. Farnham stepped back to his place and addressed Jane:

"They'll have a hard job stopping a car with those numbers on—now! They're down in the bottom of the junk under the seat."

Once more the big six thundered on its endless way, into the twilight and very shortly into the black night.

For some time they had been in the depths of the real forest, houses had been a real novelty this last thirty miles or so and the woods were growing blacker and more sombre every minute, with the early evening gloom that precedes a late moon.

To a marked and growing degree, weariness and tension were in the atmosphere of Jane's party. Mr. Farnham sensed them and took to peering intently at the roadside, until suddenly he touched Cragg and said:

"Wait! Back up a bit and then run into that little open space—see it? My eyes may be off, but I think I spotted a natural clearing in there."

Their driver obeyed; they backed and started forward again cautiously, over roadside ruts and in between trees; until, when they were quite out of sight of the highway, Mr. Farnham's voice came again in a delighted:

"There! Look at it! It might have been made for camping. Just see the ground—solid pine needles and nearly an acre of them. There is a brook, too; this is the place for us."

The tomblike silence of six exhausted humans answered him, yet Mr. Farnham was not disheartened. He stepped down blithely and assumed full command.

"Just turn her around, when they're out, so that the lights are on the clearing, Cragg, and then dim them a little. We'll find the camp lanterns presently. Now I haven't

any great experience in camping, but the first thing—"

"Is to cook a meal!" escaped Hapworthy.

"You have guessed it," said Farnham. "Who is the official cook of the party?"

Again there was dead silence!

"I think Jack was going to cook," Jane suggested. "Aren't you an expert camp cook? Mr. Farnham."

"I'm not, or any other kind!" Farnham admitted. "Can't you cook?"

"I can boil eggs," Jane said sadly. "That's all."

"Then Mrs.—"

"Not I!" Aunt Hettie broke in promptly. "The very sight of cooking sickens me!"

"I was going to suggest Mrs. Hapworthy?" Farnham pursued, and a note of real anxiety crept into his voice.

That lady laughed drearily.

"I've wanted to learn, time and again," said she. "James never would permit it."

"Then Cragg, perhaps?" the large young man asked desperately.

"Where would I learn to cook?" that simple soul demanded. "I been working since I was ten. I can't cook or—listen! Don't we eat?"

This time Mr. Farnham's voice was all anxiety.

"I'm beginning to think," said he, "that we do not."

CHAPTER VII.

TERRORS OF THE NIGHT.

A CHORUS of tremulous sighs came from the black depths of Jane's car. The chorus merged with the soughing of the branches overhead and died out again—and from the most unexpected quarter a trumpet of hope blared out!

"If you'd let *me* try?" Mary Callum asked brightly.

"Can you cook?" Mr. Farnham gasped.

"Well, I think so," replied Mary, and pardonable pride struggled hard with innate modesty in her tone. "I have taken three different courses in domestic science; mother believes in that sort of thing and so do I. And at home I make lots and lots of things that father likes."

A vast sigh of relief came from Mr. Farnham.

"We know him for a strong and well-nourished man," said he. "Bless you! Tell us what you want and where you want it put and how many of what else you want after that?"

Mary stepped down. In the light from the car they noted that her too subdued countenance was really glowing. Thus does a single touch upon its own particular penchant arouse the most dormant soul to activity.

"Why, I'll have the stove set up first, of course. Because there is a stove, isn't there. And then the eggs and the butter, sugar, flour, pepper, salt, cinnamon, flavoring extracts and so on. Worcestershire, if there is some, and the tomato catsup, too—I know one lovely thing you flavor with tomato catsup. What kind of fresh meat have we?"

"I'm afraid that bacon is the freshest thing," said Mr. Farnham.

"Oh! And I'm so much better on roasting turkey and chicken," Mary murmured disappointedly. "However, if you'll have the man unpack, I can make bacon do beautifully. And I want three frying-pans and—let me see? You don't know whether we have copper or aluminum pots? I need five of them, anyway, and the coffee-pot and the tea-pot and a pail of water. And I'll just think up exactly what I want to make while the man is getting them ready."

She fairly danced with enthusiasm; Mr. Farnham—and the rest as well—looking upon Mary, felt that she had gone all unappreciated, as they stepped down to the piney floor of their clearing.

The effect of her words upon Cragg was really remarkable. Flashlight in hand, the chauffeur was already at the side of the car, loosening numberless buckles and turning back neat canvas flaps, to reappear in the midst with armfuls of packages and tin cans.

The camp lamps were unearthed, too, and furnished less trying illumination than the headlights; and Farnham had no more than kindled them than Cragg trotted back again, with a little handful of metal and:

"I guess this'll be the stove? Huh?"

"I guess it will, from the looks of it," said Mr. Farnham. "Fill her up with gasoline."

"But you can cook only one thing at a time on that!" Mary objected.

"Yes, ma'am—one small thing," admitted their driver.

"Well—never mind," said the domestic scientist, with quenchless good cheer. "It may take a little longer, but we'll be just

that much hungrier. Now, has any one unpacked the food?"

"I've brought most of it to light," grunted Mr. Farnham, from his knees. "It seems to me that Jack said something about laying in a stock of eggs and so on, but it must have slipped my mind. Here's flour and salt—yes, and this is bacon, even if it is rather shopworn. Yes, and coffee and syrup of some kind and some canned beans."

"Where'll I put the stove?" Cragg wanted to know.

"Away over here," said Mary Callum. "And will you please bring both lanterns, too, because I shall need a lot of light. And Mrs. Hapworthy, would you mind lending me just a little hand? And—I suppose you're dreadfully tired?" she asked Aunt Hettie.

"Not too tired to do anything that will hurry the meal," that lady replied briefly.

"Then you come, too, and I'll tell you just what to do!" Mary commanded happily.

She danced away after Mr. Cragg and his lanterns and stove and the others followed somewhat dispiritedly. Jane was on the point of joining them when Mr. Farnham stayed her.

"*You* climb back in the car and make yourself comfortable—and just rest!" he said. "That cooking class is big enough now. I'll get the tents up and so on. Let's have your assistance, Happy, over on this side."

With Mr. Hapworthy puffing beside him he tugged at straps—and more straps and still more straps. Long pauses came, as they flattened sections of canvas on the ground and inspected them.

Other buckles were opened, other sections shaken out; half-drowsily, Jane heard the large young man muttering with growing wonder and disgust—but when he addressed her his voice was cheerful as usual.

"I don't know just where the misunderstanding came in," he said, "but Jack seems to have omitted the cots."

"He said he'd send everything," said Jane.

"He may have meant everything he had, but the bed equipment here is limited to just two blankets; that means sleeping on the ground, I'm afraid—but it's nice and warm these nights."

"But he sent the tents, didn't he?" the hostess asked.

"To be painfully frank, he sent just one tent—and it isn't much of a tent for size at that. Still, it will be plenty for you ladies and we can make ourselves comfortable in the car. What's the time, Happy?"

"Nearly nine o'clock," Mr. Hapworthy reported.

"Good gracious!" muttered Farnham. "They must be waiting supper for us. We'll get something to eat and then pitch the tent."

With some alacrity Jane descended from her perfect six and crossed the clearing with the two men.

There was activity on the other side. Cragg stood in the lantern light holding a pail of water and watching the tiny stove dubiously; on the other side of Mary Callum, as she bent over a steaming vessel, were Mrs. Hapworthy and Aunt Hettie, each with hands full of small articles which they passed to Mary as she called. And now, smiling brightly, Mary turned to the approaching trio.

"Oh, supper isn't nearly ready yet!" said she. "You three just keep away and we'll call you."

Mrs. James Hapworthy squinted through the gloom at her husband, just beside Jane Fayre and, in his own obvious fashion, examining her beauty by lantern light with an appreciative eye.

"*You*," said Mrs. Hapworthy, "stay here. We may need you."

"Well, I'll pitch the tent, then," Mr. Farnham announced. "Better to get it done before supper, anyway, I suppose. You ladies will want to turn in pretty early."

He moved away and Jane, presently, moved after him, to sit on the step of her car and watch him work.

It was indeed a small tent and it proved a cranky one when unaccompanied by a chart and directions. Its inventor, very likely, would have had it standing and ready in five or ten minutes; but Mr. Farnham was not its inventor.

Patiently he worked, though, stretching one section and finding that it belonged elsewhere, adjusting another only to discover that it formed part of the fly. For so insignificant a shelter, the contrivance was near to maddening, but at last it stood before them, nicely stretched and pegged into place and Mr. Farnham consulted his watch.

"Ten fifteen!" he breathed.

"And now," floated over to them in Mary's pleased voice, "I'll just make the sauce for the little puddings and then everything will be ready. But I *do* wish I could have had the fresh mushrooms and the anchovies."

They seated themselves for supper at eleven o'clock.

At eleven-five, except for Mary Callum, they felt themselves satiated, for it was not the sort of meal to be lingered over.

The viands, concocted with astounding ingenuity from a limited supply of raw materials, were strange and wonderful; there were stone-like shells, damp inside, which one mistook for biscuit at first glance; there was bacon, thoroughly burned and served with a rich sauce, and there were canned beans, reprocessed *à la* Mary Callum, so that they resembled sweetened bullets. Disconcerting disks, drowned in molasses, swashed before the company and confounded them, and there was incredible coffee and several other dishes.

Cragg, edging cautiously from the circle of light, paused at a distance. In the bushes several soft rustlings were followed by several soft thuds and then by the whine of a chauffeur still supperless.

Hapworthy, having settled next to Jane Fayre, giggled slyly and addressed her in a confidential undertone; and Farnham, noting this even as he grew thunderstruck at his supper portion, scowled blackly and finally took to watching Aunt Hettie, who gazed at her own tin plate with a heart-broken, embittered smile.

But Mary, happy and unconscious of her crime, ate blithely, pausing now and then to taste critically of this or that morsel and seeming each time satisfied that the desired result had been attained. She sat back and smiled sleepily as she said:

"It wasn't so bad, everything considered."

"It was—er—lovely!" Jane Fayre murmured kindly, as Mr. Farnham inconspicuously shied the last of her bacon into the protecting darkness.

"And for breakfast I'll make—"

"We needn't think of breakfast now, Mary," Aunt Hettie put in grimly. "Which tent is mine? Where is it?"

"There is only one—one tent," Jane faltered, "and it is ours, aunt—yours and Mary's and Mrs. Hapworthy's and mine, that is. Jack must have forgotten the others. And he forgot the beds, too, I think. We'll just have to crawl in and sleep on a blanket, Mr. Farnham says."

"And on a glorious night like this—" Mr. Farnham began.

Aunt Hettie's wordless cry stopped him; Aunt Hettie, even now, was tottering toward the little square of white canvas across the clearing. Mr. Hapworthy, rising, assisted Jane to her feet quite unnecessarily and held out his hand.

"Good night, Miss Fayre," he said feelingly.

"Good night," Jane responded listlessly.

"And pleasant dreams and——"

"Let Miss Fayre go to them!" his wife put in sharply and looked at Jane with eyes that burned suddenly.

Jane started annoyedly—and started again within the second, for Mary Callum's voice rose suddenly as Cragg shuffled past her with both hands full of soiled tin plates.

"Why, somebody didn't finish his pudding!" Mary cried. "And—oh, who left her beans and—oh!" Her voice broke and her slender white hands went up in pure overwhelming grief. "Why, there's ever so much left and—"

Aunt Hettie took her arm firmly.

"Come to bed child!" said Aunt Hettie's grim voice.

"I—I don't believe any one liked their supper!" Mary quavered regardless of grammar.

"No one can please everybody," Farnham said hastily. "What I liked especially—and it was the very finest I ever tasted, too!—was the—"

A sob stayed him. Mary Callum leaned weakly against Aunt Hettie and covered her her face; and thus Aunt Hettie led her away.

Jane looked dazedly after them. Mrs. Hapworthy, standing her ground firmly, waited for Jane to move from the person with the china-blue eyes—and suddenly Jane turned and fled tentward.

There were, it seemed, no conventional preparations for this night's slumber; given two blankets and a tent barely sufficient to permit of their being stretched to their full width, it was plain that one merely crawled in upon the under blanket as one was, drew up the other blanket and, ostensibly, pillowed one's cheek on Nature's bosom and dropped into dreamless sleep. Aunt Hettie had already entered with the lantern and Mary Callum was trailing limply after; side by side they surveyed the lonely blanket

that was mattress, sheet and everything else; side by side and silently they dropped to their knees and stretched their weary bodies.

Some beds, like some meals, are beyond mere spoken comment; this was one of them.

Mrs. Hapworthy waited significantly for Jane to follow and the hostess bent her head mutely and entered, intuition prompting her to select the outer edge of the blanket as the best spot from which to make a possible escape. Without dignity and with scant comfort they laid themselves down side by side, blew out the light and drew up the odd blanket.

It covered the central pair quite nicely, but it left a breezy spot on one side of Jane Fayre.

She strove to draw the covering closer and earned a sharp word from Aunt Hettie, who was struggling with the farther edge. She drew her warm coat tighter and even found herself smiling at the situation.

As a pleasure trip, this one lacked many essential elements, but at least it was serving its original purpose. If Thompson were behind—and he must be close behind now—he would pass this particular spot a dozen times in the darkness without even knowing of its existence.

A machine roared out, down the road, after a bit, and Jane's heart paused; but it roared on past them and she breathed again as the sound died away in the distance.

The tremendous stillness of the forest soothed her, too; it was just lulling her to slumber when Mrs. Hapworthy spoke:

"Miss Fayre!"

"Yes?"

"You will pardon me, I know," the lady said steadily, "but I am a woman who believes in the utmost candor."

"What?" said Jane, waking entirely.

"About James," said James's wife. "Mind, I don't *say* that you were flirting with him at supper-time."

"I wasn't!" her hostess gasped. "Why—"

"Very well, then, you were not!" said Mrs. Hapworthy. "But what I want to say, in just so many words, is this: *don't!*"

"Why, I—I—" Jane stammered, and in the darkness she felt a burning flush of mortification.

"Very well, Miss Fayre. Very well!" the lady repeated sweetly. "I often find it better to nip these things in the bud. That is all. You do understand?"

"No, I do not," Jane faltered.

Aunt Hettie rose on one elbow, causing a chilly wave to surge between the blankets.

"Don't try to," she advised harshly. "Mrs. Hapworthy, is it possible that you're jealous of that simpering creature?"

"Not at all!" said the wife of the fascinating James and laughed nastily.

"Heaven defend us!" Aunt Hettie exclaimed. "I should think that if any woman was fool enough to take him off your hands, you'd—"

This time it was Mrs. Hapworthy who rose, causing another cool wave to pass over them.

"Oh, *do* you think so?" she asked, forcefully. "Do you really think that? Well, let me tell you—"

"Oh, please!" Jane cried. "Please!"

"I shall—shall not lower myself to answer!" Mrs. Hapworthy stated, sinking back.

For a time, when silence had dropped with a heavy thud upon the little tent, the very air vibrated her emotion; but when one has spent the day covering the best part of three hundred miles in a car, emotions have less than their normal vitality.

Jane, to be sure, put in a sad ten minutes of agonized waiting for the next eruption, but it failed to come. Rigid as a statue and quite as motionless, Mrs. Hapworthy lay beside her—and after a time Jane's heavy lids began to droop again.

Mercifully, she was floating away from it all—from Thompson and her ill-starred party and everything else. She was floating up into a beautiful, brilliant, peaceful region and the only person present beside herself seemed to be Mr. Farnham.

He was smiling cheerily as usual and very busy doing something useful, although she could not see just what. She was drawing nearer, when:

"Jane!" came suddenly and thinly to her ear.

Jane stirred drowsily.

"Jane, dear!" the voice said sharply.

"Is that you, Mary?" Jane asked, as her eyes came open again.

"Yes, dear," said the cook of the party. "Jane, dear, did *you* eat your beans?"

"Why—I think so."

"All of them?"

"I—I'm not sure," said Mary's hostess.

The cook sighed loudly.

"Truly, Jane," her wistful tone pursued, "weren't they nice?"

"Why, I don't care much about beans—canned ones, you know," Jane laughed.

"I know, but I fixed these so that nobody would ever know they were canned," Mary informed her.

It was the truth, yet Jane could not answer. Instead, she breathed softly, indicating sleep.

"Jane," the cook went on forlornly, "was the pudding good?"

"No, it was awful," came explosively from Mrs. Hapworthy's section!

"Oh, Jane! Was it truly?" Mary cried. "Jane, dear! Answer me!"

A small, challenging snort came from Mrs. Hapworthy. Jane shivered.

"Well, of course, dear, you really had nothing to work with," she began. "One could hardly expect to—"

"Oh, it wasn't good! It wasn't!" Mary cried, and there was a soft thud as she dropped back again. "And I thought that it was so nice!"

She was weeping. Minute after minute she wept, not loudly but convulsively and with an excess of real grief that might have been quite heart-rending had it been prompted by something with more human appeal than pudding.

"Do you have hysterics?" Aunt Hettie asked, unpleasantly.

"I do, sometimes!" Mary sobbed.

"Don't have any here, my child," the chaperon advised. "Because if you do I shall take you out and douse you in that brook!"

The sobbing quieted suddenly. It did not cease, however. In gulps and little gasps, choking whines and shuddering intakes of breath, Mary's sorrow continued to manifest itself through further minutes. Finally, though, it died out slowly and it seemed that Mary slept—but after this second awakening sleep had fled from Jane. Drearily she lay on the hard ground and chillily, declining to think, listening to the trio as they breathed their several ways to slumberland.

It seemed at last that they had reached the goal, but Jane could not follow. Her limbs were cramping and her joints aching and her head seemed to have selected one of earth's hardest square feet as its pillow.

She moved once or twice and each time drew a low, animal growl from Mrs. Hapworthy that put an end to motion; she wondered whether it must not be almost morning, and speculated on how far Batesford lay to the northwest—and eventually the discomfort gained the upper hand, and Jane knew that she must walk about for a minute or two or shriek!

So it came that, with infinite caution, she wormed her way from beneath the blanket, all but dragged up the wretched little tent as she half-rose and finally attained the velvet gloom of the clearing. Off in the east the moon was just coming over the hills; six feet to the west stood the shadowy form of Mr. Farnham.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOY AND MORE TERRORS.

IN the most curious fashion, Jane Fayre's heart took to pounding—not with fright, because she recognized Mr. Farnham upon the instant. But the heart pounded nevertheless, and it did not cease as Farnham said softly:

"Couldn't you get to sleep?"

"I wasn't sleepy," Jane whispered. "Weren't you?"

"No, I've been wandering around in the woods—I'm a good deal like a cat at night, anyway," he told her. "We must be almost on a mountaintop."

"You've been climbing?"

"Just a little way. The growth isn't very thick here. I discovered the greatest little outlook that you ever saw up above. It's nothing but a big rock, but with the moon coming up you can see for miles. I'll take you up there in the morning."

"I'm afraid that we'll have to start rather early in the morning," Jane sighed.

"Very well, I'll take you up there now," said Mr. Farnham. "It's not more than five minutes' easy going. Will you come?"

"Can we do it without waking the others?"

Farnham chuckled softly.

"Hapworthy's in a complete collapse and Cragg's snoring like an engine," he said. "You couldn't rouse either of them with a cannon. Are they all asleep in there?"

Adventure rippled on Jane's low laugh.

"I think so; let's go."

Mr. Farnham came closer; the absurd heart pounded on.

"You'd better take my arm, if you will, and keep pretty close. It's darker than sixty in there among the undergrowth, but it is almost like daylight up above. Over this way."

Side by side, they tiptoed across the clearing and the forest gloom swallowed them. Side by side they mounted a gentle rise of ground and then a steeper one, with Jane stumbling now and then and Farnham catching her unfailingly.

Light conversation or any other kind seemed stilled by the woodland quiet; in perfect silence they came out suddenly upon a mighty boulder—and it seemed that all the world was trees, stretching below them in the full moon's light.

Jane, having contemplated it all for a minute, drew a long breath of delight.

"Shall we sit here for a little and watch it?" Farnham asked quietly.

"I'd love to."

Side by side, they settled on the big rock—and the peculiar silence engulfed them again; until Farnham, thinking aloud, muttered:

"It's rather more peaceful than what I shall be watching a month from to-night!"

"The factory?"

"The devil's factory," sighed the large young man. "It'll probably be a European battlefield, with things going full blast."

"But you're not going over there?" Jane asked.

"I'm sailing in another two weeks—business, you know. That's why I was so tremendously glad of this chance to get out and look at the woods again for a few days."

Jane smiled into the distance rather relievedly.

"Business won't take you to many battlefields," she said.

"No?" Mr. Farnham laughed lightly. "This business will. I'm going over as official observer for the house."

"Observer of what?"

"Shells, Miss Fayre! Fine large shells packed with gun cotton and smokeless powder and black powder and other odds and ends—in the act of bursting. We make them, you know, and there are a good many things we need to understand more fully, and there is nothing like actual observation of their working. Somebody had to go and they were kind enough to feel that I was best fitted."

"To stand around on battlefields while they're fighting?" Jane demanded.

Farnham laughed again.

"I fancy it all depends upon standing on the right spot, when they begin to mix things up in earnest," said he. "Two or three months from now, if I'm still in one piece, I expect to be the most expert little chooser of safe spots the world has ever known.

"Oh, they've arranged everything for me, you know. I have a whole sackful of credentials ready at home, requesting different generals to let me stand where our brand of shells is bursting fastest. It'll be quite an experience."

"But isn't it dangerous?" Jane asked breathlessly.

"Why, yes, if something happens to hit one," Mr. Farnham said cheerfully. "I have no idea at all of being hit."

"Yes, but if you were, you'd be killed!" his hostess cried.

The large young man looked suddenly and curiously down at Jane Fayre beside him. Jane, for a moment, faced him and there was no denying that her lips trembled; and then she was looking over the forest again and saying, quite without any volition of her own:

"I don't want you to go!"

"Jane! Do you mean that?" Mr. Farnham choked. "Jane, dear, do you—I—I beg your pardon!" he stammered. "I didn't mean to—to say that or—"

No rebuke came from Jane Fayre. Twenty mighty seconds throbbed into the past while Mr. Farnham, lips parted and breath coming uncertainly, looked down upon Jane; and then he came closer, and his voice was husky as he said:

"Does my going make any real difference to you?"

"I don't want you to go over there and be killed!" Jane said almost inaudibly.

"Then if you tell me to stay—Jane!" cried Mr. Farnham, quite irresponsibly and with no relevance at all to the European war. "Don't you know that you're the only thing in the world I've been able to think about ever since July? Don't you know that that dear face of yours has been before me every minute of the time—in the factory smoke and in the streets and everywhere else?"

"I didn't know it," Jane replied faintly.

"I never believed in love at first sight before I knew you, Jane," Mr. Farnham rushed on. "I didn't believe it even then for days, until the second time I met you last summer; and then I knew that you were everything in the world that mattered to me; and then common sense told me that you'd never care a rap about me, and

I was downright glad when this war thing came up and I could take it!"

"You—you want to be killed?" Jane gasped.

"I didn't care whether I was blown to bits or not, until five minutes ago!" said the astonishing Mr. Farnham. "But I did want to see you just once before I started, and when Weston called me up—oh, Jane, dear! If you could only know how I love you, and if you could only tell me that maybe, some day, you'd care enough about me to marry me—why, all the shells in their beastly old war could never harm me or—"

It is something to know one's mind. These last amazing minutes Jane had labored under the impression that she did not know her own; it was, of course, absurd that she could be in love with this young man, whatever his qualities.

He was different, far different from any man of her acquaintance; he was splendid and the thought of having him hurt stung her and frightened her as nothing had ever frightened her before; but at the same time—it was here that Jane stole a glance at Wilbur Farnham's decidedly handsome features, so close to her in the moonlight. In the most minute fraction of time Jane knew her mind!

"You're not going to their beastly old war!" she said. "I won't let you!"

Farnham's arms went out to her.

"Jane—oh, my darling!" he said hoarsely. "Is it true? You do love me just a little?"

Jane Fayre swayed toward him and her eyes looked into his own. They were very wonderful eyes just now as Jane breathed:

"Oh, Will, I think—"

She said no more! As if snatched back by an invisible hand of steel, Jane ceased swaying and drew herself away from the handsome young man; her hands, which had risen instinctively toward him, dropped quickly.

Jane, staring at Mr. Farnham for two or three blank, horrified seconds, shrank away and covered her eyes.

For the moment she had quite forgotten, but—she was not Jane Fayre!

In point of law, she was Jane Thompson, a married woman. And while her whirling brain tried to tell her, over and over, that she was no more Jane Thompson than Jane Jones, while her whole being yearned toward Farnham's strong arms and her lips to tell him that love at first sight was the realest thing in the world, the cold, hard fact persisted.

Somewhere at their heels, a desperate criminal was hurrying toward them, and with him, Jane seemed to know, was a marriage certificate bearing her own name.

It was well enough to crouch here and tell herself wildly that she had but to confide all in Farnham and he would understand—but would he? Would he even believe her?

And if he professed to believe her and actually did not, was his love so great that he would know her to be without blame?

Suppose the unthinkable Thompson appeared and told whatever lying version of the nightmare seemed best suited to his needs of the moment? He would have the certificate and the records of the justice's office and the witnesses and all to substantiate him!

An instant's dreadful temptation came to Jane, to surrender to Farnham's arms and keep her secret.

It could not be. She huddled lower down, a miserable little bundle of bewildered humanity; and Mr. Farnham, amazed but all uncomprehending, caught her to him—and became more amazed as he felt Jane drag herself away and heard her heartbroken:

"Oh, don't! Please don't!"

"Jane!"

"Oh, please!" Jane pleaded. "I can't—can't—"

"Can't what?"

"Marry you!" Jane whispered.

"But—why?" Farnham gasped.

"I—can't tell you."

Mr. Farnham drew both her hands from her face.

"You must tell me," said he. "Jane, you do love me?"

"More and better than any one else in the world!" Jane avowed steadily.

"Then—there is somebody else?"

"No!" his hostess said wretchedly.

Pure amazement crept into Mr. Farnham's eyes and with it some amusement.

"Dear little girl," he said softly, "whatever is the trouble? They haven't rushed you into an engagement with some one? Because if they have—"

"I'm not engaged."

"Is it because I'm comparatively poor, Jane?" Farnham asked more quietly. "I'm a long way from the millionaire class, but at the same time—"

"Oh, it isn't that! It isn't that!" Jane cried stormily.

And then, since she had quite resolved to keep her distance from Mr. Farnham, utter misery overwhelmed her and she seemed to drift into his arms.

They were about her now and she was clinging to him and tears were coming fast; face hidden on the shoulder of his shaggy coat, Jane indulged them for a little, while Farnham held her close and purred soft, soothing nothings.

Thus they sat until, having quite convinced Mr. Farnham that—whatever its original and imaginary source—her unaccountable shrinking from him was gone forever, Jane drew back from him, steadily and resolutely, until she was free once more.

She faced Mr. Farnham with a small, forlorn and very tragic smile.

"Will, dear," said Jane, and all the sorrows of the world were in her voice, "we —we mustn't love each other. I can't tell you why now, and maybe I can never tell you. Don't ask me why—please don't! I can't tell!"

"You poor silly little girl!" Farnham cried in exasperation, and tried to capture her again and failed. "I don't know what it is, but I do know that it isn't real. Come here and tell me about it."

"I can't!" Jane murmured. "We'd better go down again."

"Not until I find out what is wrong."

Jane only laughed wearily, but there was a certain gloomy finality in the laugh.

"Jane, dear," said the large young man, "is this mysterious obstacle something that's likely to last forever?"

"I hope not," Jane shuddered. "But we —we must wait until it is gone."

"I don't know about that. You've never seen me remove obstacles, dear. If you will just tell me about this one, and let me show you a little sample of my work in that line—?"

"I can't," Jane said monotonously as she arose.

Mr. Farnham was also on his feet and his large, strong hand caught her and turned her toward him.

"Jane," he said sternly, "not an hour ago I was taking some satisfaction in the melancholy thought of that battlefield proposition. Now I'll admit frankly that if I happened to be engaged to the sweetest girl in the whole world, I should be more than likely to throw up the job without ever sailing, and start up here for myself, as I've been meaning to do this last year. But to a man who isn't engaged, you know, and has no hope of becoming engaged, a few million bursting shells make such an appeal—"

"Will! You don't mean that?" Jane cried.

"It is possible," said Mr. Farnham, "that I do not. But I want most awfully to make you believe that I do, and then, perhaps—"

She had turned away from him with a quivering sigh; she was already on her way down the dark side of the rock. Mr. Farnham shook his head, and hurried to her side again. His arm sought to encircle her, and was gently thrust away, while Jane sighed again.

Quite savagely Mr. Farnham gripped the slender hand that rested upon his sleeve for guidance as they passed downhill again.

Whatever the exact and doubtless scandalous hour, the moon had been climbing busily since their ascent. Elusive bright patches were everywhere in the forest; at a distance they could see the long, dim stretch of road and nearer at hand the top of Jane's beautiful six and a hint of the tent at the far side of the clearing.

It was while staring gloomily at the car and wondering whether, after all, some family decree against relatively poor young men as possible husbands for Jane might not be at the bottom of his present trouble, that Mr. Farnham halted for a moment and squinted more narrowly at the automobile. He quickened their steps and, only a matter of yards from the clearing, halted and said oddly:

"We'd be in a hole if that man Cragg should leave us here!"

"What do you mean?"

Once more Mr. Farnham squinted.

"Just wait where you are and don't be frightened if you hear a little racket," chuckled Mr. Farnham and started headlong from beside her. "I may be wrong, but I think—"

He had vanished. Jarred suddenly from her own sad meditations, Jane tried to follow his remarkable flight. She was almost beside the clearing now and in the brilliant moonlight she saw Mr. Farnham dash straight across its piney width.

Then, heading down the aisle toward the road, he disappeared again; and perhaps two seconds later a soft, heavy thud disturbed the soundless night and in Mr. Cragg's voice a shrill:

"For th' love o' Mike, mister! What the—"

"I got you!" Mr. Farnham's voice declared with some satisfaction.

"Well—well, certainly you got me!" Cragg responded breathlessly. "Hey! Get off my chest! Wotter you tryin' to do to a poor little guy like me, you big—"

There was an audible shuffle as Jane, disregarding instructions, hurried across the clearing, past the violently sleeping Mr. Hapworthy, past the tent from which came Aunt Hettie's high-keyed whistle and down toward the road and the scene of trouble.

She arrived in time to see Mr. Farnham raise Mr. Cragg to his feet by means of his collar, and to hear him say:

"Where were you bound for, you little idiot?"

"I was—was taking a walk!" Cragg answered indignantly.

"Where?"

"For a drink of water!"

"The brook's up the other way, you know," said Mr. Farnham, without releasing his hold. "And do you always take that little grip of yours when you go for a drink, just as you took it to go for a wrench? What the devil's the matter with you, anyway? Why don't you want to drive that car? . . . Oh, are you there, Miss Fayre?" Mr. Farnham said more mildly.

"Why, certainly I want to drive it!" Cragg whined suddenly. "Why wouldn't I—"

"I was pretty certain that my eyes were not failing," Farnham pursued. "I saw him sneak out of the car and look around, and then button up his duster and reach in for his bag. Then he bent down and began to run straight across the clearing and down to the road and—that's where I caught up!"

Jane came nearer.

"Were you trying to leave us, Cragg?" she asked sharply.

Had she been in doubt before that some mystic influence emanated from herself and affected Cragg most oddly, doubt vanished now. Mr. Cragg seemed to shrink suddenly; his eyes lost their defiance and dropped to the ground; under Mr. Farnham's touch he shook slightly as he mumbled:

"Why, no—no, ma'am. I wasn't trying to leave. Why would I try to leave, especially in a place like this, where I'd have to walk miles, even if I did want to leave?"

"I don't know. But *do* you want to?"

"No, ma'am!" Cragg repeated shakily. "No, ma'am! I want to stay!"

His eyes failed to rise. Mr. Farnham glanced at Jane. There in the moonlight, hair rather towsled, a puzzled little smile dimpling her cheeks, she seemed even more exquisite and adorable—and maddeningly, mysteriously farther from Mr. Farnham than ever.

This fact earned Cragg a shake of extra violence and put a savage note into Mr. Farnham's voice as he said:

"Well, you're too queer for me—and you're too insignificant to argue with; but you'll stay put this time. I'll guarantee you that much, Cragg. Is there a tow-rope in that car?"

"Under the front seat," Cragg muttered.

"Get it out, then, and I'll show you a trick or two with it!" Mr. Farnham laughed unpleasantly. "And do it quietly, too!"

His hand still fastened under the driver's collar, he propelled Mr. Cragg to the car and waited while, with really commendable caution, the fellow delved under the seat and finally brought forth several yards of heavy rope. In the rear Mr. Hapworthy slumbered on, an unlovely sprawl; Jane turned from a momentary inspection of him to watch Mr. Farnham, who had lighted one of the lanterns and was favoring Cragg with an evil smile.

"It'll interest you to know, Cragg, that I am one of the few surviving Americans who ran away to sea as a child. I made one trip around the Horn as cabin boy on a clipper ship and it cured me; but the old mate of that ship took a great fancy to me and taught me every knot, bight and hitch in the world. Put out your hands and I'll show you a simple one!" said Mr. Farnham.

The hands came out, albeit Mr. Cragg failed even then to look up or voice a single word of protest. The rope twirled and tightened; and Mr. Farnham, having raised the light to examine his work, said complacently:

"There. You can pull and twist on that till midnight to-morrow, and every twist will make it that much tighter! Do you want to sit on the ground or on the step of the car? I think the ground's best," said Mr. Farnham, as he twitched out a robe and laid it flat. "Lie down there, you!"

"Well, boss!" breathed Mr. Cragg, as he obeyed.

Whistling softly, Mr. Farnham dropped to his knees and entwined Mr. Cragg's ankles with the deftest of loops; he squinted at it and pulled taut; he tried it with both hands and it seemed not to budge the fraction of an inch.

Mr. Farnham, therefore, rose with the spare yards of rope and considered the rear axle of the car.

"I think this will hold you nicely till we need you to drive again," he said pleasantly, when he had accomplished a new and even more intricate knot about the metal.

He turned to Jane with a satisfied nod.

"Our driver will be with us in the morning," he said softly. "You'd better run along, dear, and try to get some sleep."

Cragg forgotten even as he lay there, the same deep glow in her eyes, his hostess looked at Farnham for a moment and then turned away quickly. Mr. Farnham gazed longingly after her as she crossed to the little tent; he sighed heavily and, lantern swinging, took a few irresolute steps from the captive, eyes on the ground.

At the tent Jane paused and looked back once more. Wilbur Farnham, who must be mortally tired, was strolling on through the moonlight, wrapped in his own thoughts, toward the scene of his recent scuffle.

Happier and at the same time more miserable than ever before in her life Jane watched him; he would vanish presently behind that bush and Jane would steal into the crowded tent and take her place again —not to sleep, but to lie there and think of the wonderful thing that had happened.

She would plan a letter to Uncle Horace, to be mailed at their next stopping point, and to urge that gentleman to any and all means necessary to rid her of the Thompson blight. It was certain that she could never tell Wilbur that story; it was possible that he might never know!

Wilbur failed to vanish behind the bush. Instead, he stopped short, stooped and picked up something from the ground. It seemed to be a bit of paper, and he held it to the lantern.

And then, with a dramatic violence rarely seen on the subdued modern stage, Mr. Farnham executed a perfectly genuine start! He gripped the paper and held it and the lantern nearer to his eyes. He seemed to reel for an instant.

Then, as Jane hurried forward eagerly to learn the nature of his find, he drew himself up and started toward her. His shoulders seemed very square as he paused before Jane and heard her:

"What was it, Will? What did you find?"

Mr. Farnham extended the paper.

"You needn't have let me rave on," said his strange, hoarse voice. "You might have told me, Mrs. Thompson!"

And here Jane's fingers touched the proffered thing and a scream rose to her lips and all but escaped to rouse the company—for upon the very instant she recognized the accursed sheet.

Of all the billions of paper fragments in the world to float in here and be found by Wilbur Farnham, this one was the most hideously impossible!

It chanced to be Jane's marriage certificate!

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAR BEHIND.

COMPLETELY numbed through several terrible seconds, Jane Fayre's unhappy brain returned slowly to life and activity.

The thing was there, because she had held it, and it had fluttered from her fingers and Farnham had picked it up and was offering it to her again. Where in the name of all sanity it had come from was quite beyond her.

But the manner of its appearance was insignificant now. It had appeared and Wilbur Farnham had read it; and he was thrusting it at her and saying with a sad attempt at cool speech:

"This is yours, Mrs. Thompson, and—"

"It isn't mine, and if you call me Mrs. Thompson again, I'll—I'll—" burst from Jane.

Farnham smiled sadly.

"I'm so sorry," he said quietly. "Sorry that you are unhappily married and still sorrier if you really care anything about me, because that makes it rather harder for both of us."

"Wilbur!" Jane panted. "Tear up that horrible thing!"

"It is yours, is it not?"

"Yes, but—"

Instead of obeying Mr. Farnham only smiled more sadly and folded the "horrible thing."

"One can't very well tear up the facts," he sighed. "You may need this again, for one reason or another. . . . I'll cut loose early in the morning, of course, Mrs. —ah—Miss Fayre, if you prefer that. I'll tell them something about a midnight messenger turning up with a telegram for me and—"

"You're not going away?" Jane cried.

Mr. Farnham's teeth gritted queerly.

"I can endure a lot, but I can't endure looking at you and thinking that you belong to another man—"

"I don't," his hostess choked out.

"Is there no Thompson?" Mr. Farnham asked quickly.

"Of course there is, but—"

"Then don't tell me about it!" Farnham said quickly, and a strange little smile of pain crossed his lips. "I'd rather not hear it—honestly. I've seen so much of that sort of unhappiness that I can fill in the details only too easily. I suppose he's good-looking, and you were even a year younger then than you are now—and you're a good deal of a kid yet. He drinks and—"

"Wilbur!" Jane pleaded.

"But he is your husband after all, and you've been lucky enough to keep the thing quiet—and for your sake, if you want to keep it quiet, I hope that it never becomes public property.

"But I don't want to hear about it, and especially from you, dear," Farnham went on brokenly. "I want to go away and remember to-night as you and I sat up there together, and I want to forget all the rest of it."

And then, being a good deal of a man, he held out his hand and said with a smile: "Goodby, Jane, and perhaps it isn't as bad as you think. Marriage is a life business, after all; I've never been able to regard it as something to be undertaken and cast aside again at one's pleasure. A girl like you never has more than one real love affair, and you must have loved this Thompson or you'd never have married him—and I honestly believe that sooner or later you'll patch up your troubles and be happy with him."

"I—" Jane began wildly.

"Why not take him away somewhere to a new country, where nobody knows either of you, and try making a man of him? It may turn out that he—"

"Wilbur," said Jane, with great difficulty, as she caught at the young man's coat lapels and shook him, "do you want me to go stark, staring mad, right here?"

"No," the self-repressed one smiled imperturbably, "but—"

"Then *stop!*" gasped his lovely hostess. "I have been hoping—oh, I don't know just why!—that you might never hear about Thompson. But if you're going to think all those things I want you to know the truth as soon as possible and—Wilbur," Jane pleaded, "take me up to the rock again, where the rest of them can't hear!"

Perhaps the most astonishing thing, as the moon hung high and the east grew very black, was that Mr. Farnham laughed!

He did not smile cynically and glance incredulously at Jane Fayre, although he did growl queerly several times as the extraordinary recital came trembling from her lips. Neither did he leap to his feet and, wholly overcome by a sense of Jane's wrongs, grow frenzied and vow to drink deeply of Mr. Thompson's blood or die in the attempt.

Instead, having drawn Jane close to him, Mr. Farnham vibrated silently for half a minute, until:

"Well, does it seem *funny?*" Jane asked crisply.

Mr. Farnham sobered suddenly.

"I wasn't laughing at the thing itself—at least, I think I wasn't," he said. "I was laughing because I'm so infernally happy, Jane. Down there, when I looked at that certificate, I honestly thought that my heart had broken."

Amazement replaced asperity in Jane's tone.

"Wherever did it come from?"

"Are you perfectly sure you haven't had it all the time?"

"Of course."

"I give it up then, child," Mr. Farnham said, without great concern. "I think it may have dropped straight from Heaven, to smooth out matters between you and me."

"Well, I don't!" Jane averred. "And, Wilbur—there was a big car somewhere well behind us, you know. It tore along this road some time after that dreadful supper, and it hasn't come back. It must have been Thompson and that certificate must have fluttered away from him as he passed. . . . Or could he have known that we were here and deliberately thrown it out?"

No fear shook Mr. Farnham; he pursed

his lips and, having pondered, smiled admiringly.

"I believe that you've hit it," he said. "Don't worry about Thompson."

"Worry!" cried Jane. "When this whole trip was for the purpose of getting away from him?"

"Listen to me," continued Farnham. "This trip was a simon-pure blessing, ordained by Providence to bring us together. You're not in any danger whatever, from Thompson or anybody else, because nothing can get anywhere near you while I'm alive, Jane. Look at this gun."

"It looks like Thompson's," Jane shivered.

"It happens to be mine, and I can pot nine Thompsons out of ten at fifty yards—and it would give me a great deal of innocent pleasure to pot one at least. That'll be all about Thompson to-night, Jane. You're going down now and get an hour or two of sleep at least. And you're to forget about him. Do you hear?"

"Yes, Wilbur," Jane said meekly. "But—"

"Because that poor little head has been making a mountain out of a molehill," concluded Mr. Farnham, rising and drawing the owner of the poor little head to her feet. "All else apart, getting rid of him legally can't be a matter of more than a month or two, and there is no hurry.

"We'll just go on with the jog, Jane, and it will be a jog hereafter, and a lazy one; and when we get back, if your uncle hasn't settled the matter, let me call in a fellow I've known for years; he's the sharpest thing that ever owned a law office and he'll blow your Thompson so far out of the water that he'll never come down again. Meanwhile, you're going to bed!"

Farnham, of course, minimized the danger. So Jane reflected as she crawled back with infinite caution to her own place in the crowded and mercifully somnolent tent.

There in the darkness, with sleep overtaking her whether she willed it or not, it seemed to Jane that Farnham ignored the plain fact of their pursuit too calmly—for there could be no doubt that Thompson was in the neighborhood. He had telephoned after them and she strongly suspected that he had passed them in the roaring car of the earlier night. Doubtless he would plunge on and on until he discovered that he was chasing empty air; and then he would turn around and come back!

It was Mrs. Hapworthy who awakened her.

Mrs. Hapworthy stood half erect in the little tent, adjusting her hair by the touch system and looking at her hostess with lips compressed.

"Your aunt and Miss Callum have gone to the brook, I believe," she said. "I thought it as well to wait for you."

"Why—" Jane said hazily.

"Because I thought it as well; that is *quite* all!" the lady repeated, leaving the tent and pausing just outside in the early sunshine.

Seconds passed before Jane, roused from dreams of her own, realized that the wretched owner of blue-eyed James was harping on her pet theme; she smiled wearily and then smiled with sudden brilliance, because Farnham's voice was coming across the clearing:

"Yes, he tried to cut loose and leave us without a driver last night so I pinned him down. I think he's a little bit crazy. Eh, Cragg?"

"I ain't crazy!" the eccentric chauffeur rasped. "Lemme up and lemme put the spare shoe on that back wheel, boss. That there one ain't going to last another twenty miles, the way we burn up the road."

Jane looked out. Mr. Farnham was twitching knots from their captive with an ease that caused Cragg to scowl unfeigned disgust; and when Mr. Farnham had considered their driver's stiff and difficult arising, he led him aside suddenly and his eyes grew rather hard.

"I don't know what's wrong with you, Cragg," Jane caught in a stern undertone, "but I do know what will happen to you if you try any more of these lightning dives. You're going to take Miss Fayre's car into Batesford at last, and farther if she wishes. And the next time I catch you making a get-away I'm going to send a bullet through one of your legs. Get it?"

"I get it!" the driver muttered, as Jane left her tent; and he looked straight at her and shrank away in the same inexplicable fashion and fumbled about among the tools for the jack.

A long, deep glance passed between Mr. Farnham and his hostess. He was moving toward her, when Aunt Hettie abandoned the task of encouraging Mary Callum as she worked spiritlessly over the tiny gasoline stove and hurried toward her niece.

"Good morning, Jane," said Aunt Hettie.

"Good morning," beamed Jane.

"You look saner to-day," the chaperon pursued. "That's what I came over to talk about. I can't imagine what possessed you yesterday, but to-day we are to have no speed exhibitions!"

"Very well," smiled Jane.

"Because if that man tries—*just once,* and Mrs. Hapworthy and I have agreed on this—if he tries to do one thing faster than twenty miles an hour, this party will cease on the spot and go home by train. Is that understood?"

"Of course it is understood, dear," her niece smiled, and her exquisite eyes passed Aunt Hettie and caressed Mr. Farnham's shoulder. "We needn't hurry."

"Go wash, then!" directed the elder lady. "There's a little pool just up the brook, and the water is hardly above freezing point. It's delightful; your friend Mary almost fainted."

She returned to Miss Callum's side as that young woman protested tearfully that she couldn't seem to cook for any one but papa, and Wilbur Farnham hurried to Jane. His expression seemed to her far less carefree and animated than in the moonlight; he was tired, of course, although he looked more worried than tired.

He glanced over his shoulder and, since the others were out of hearing, said quickly:

"Jane, dear, I don't want to frighten you, but you'd better run up the brook a way and then—*remain.*"

"In the woods?"

"Yes, and well out of sight, dear. I think your man Thompson is due here in the flesh in a few minutes."

"Wilbur!" his hostess gasped.

"Hush!" commanded Mr. Farnham. "There may be nothing in it at all; and if he does turn up and you are not in sight, I may be able to steer him away before he makes any trouble. But a car went by here about twenty minutes ago, making fifty or sixty miles an hour, and I caught a good glimpse of it."

"Well?"

"It was one of those big, heavy roadster affairs, Jane, and there were two men in it. One of them was half-standing, to get a view of the road ahead."

"Was he big? Were his shoulders four or five feet across and his head a little bullet without any neck and—"

Farnham laughed shortly.

"I had no chance to measure him, and it may not have been our Thompson at all, but he was looking for some one, and there are mighty few people to look for in these parts. Just hurry in there, little girl, and stay until I come for you."

A moment Jane hesitated; then, noting the real anxiety in his eye, she hesitated no more. Her little traveling-case in hand, the hostess of the party stepped quickly into the bushes and up the brook for such renovating processes as are possible in an icy pool that must serve as basin and mirror at once.

All things considered, however, she felt herself rather presentable after a little, and took to listening for sounds of Thompson. As if they had been waiting to claim her undivided attention, the sounds materialized almost at once!

In the far, far distance the heavy roar of a big motor with open cut-out trembled faintly on the air; it came nearer and nearer and, in marvelously few seconds, it seemed to be coming up the far side of their hill and—yes, it was dipping down the road toward them now!

She could see nothing of the machine and, as this morning's splendid sanity informed her, there was always the excellent chance that it might hold almost any one of America's hundred millions who was not Thompson at all; yet she waited unbreathing until the clattering din had passed their sheltered clearing without pause and was dying out again.

Then, it seemed to Jane, the car stopped, but she had no more than gained the impression than Farnham was with her, grinning.

"False alarm, evidently," he said. "They went back faster than they came, and—"

"And we can't hear them at all now!"

"Eh? That's true," the young man admitted. "We—hello! There they are, starting up again, and they're coming this way."

He listened intently and his handsome countenance grew very dark with anxiety, for there was no doubt at all that the mysterious racer was returning, even again!

"It's that confounded fancy tread on the back wheels," he muttered. "That was what I feared when I came to think it out—that he might get track of that tread and follow it on these lonely roads."

"Wilbur! They've stopped! They've stopped right beside the clearing!" Jane gasped.

"They might as well have stopped on

the other side of the moon, for all the harm they'll do you, Jane," Farnham said quietly, and his pistol slipped into his coat-pocket. "You stay here. I'll go down and see."

"You're not going to kill him?"

"I'm not going to kill anybody unless he tries to kill me," Farnham chuckled. "But you keep out of sight and if there should happen to be any shooting, lie down flat and wait until I come back for you. But there'll be no shooting."

In spite of which, Jane noted, he gripped the pistol rather firmly as he left her; and in spite of his commands Jane followed Mr. Farnham very quietly; and thus, in a minute or so, they came to the edge of the clearing.

It was apparent enough that their party's refuge had been discovered. Out on the road they could glimpse a long and dusty roadster, with a man leaning on the wheel, and through the bushes another figure was plowing energetically and—

"That's Thompson!" breathed Mr. Farnham.

"It can't be," Jane said quickly. "He'd be head and shoulders over that growth."

"He's stooping," the young man reminded her. "And since you seem to have followed me, young woman, keep directly behind and don't grab me, whatever happens. . . . I think you've infected me with the terror of this citizen, Jane; I believe I'll get the drop on him before he appears, for he's coming with a rush."

Inconspicuously his pistol came to light and Mr. Farnham crouched a trifle lower. And then, with an astonished jerk, Mr. Farnham was upright again and saying disgustedly:

"Well—good Lord! There's no size to him at all! He's actually little, Jane."

"Why, that—that's my Uncle Horace!" cried Jane.

"Your—"

"Uncle Horace Porter-Preston!" Jane assured him. "Wherever did he come from?"

Whatever his starting point, it was plain that Uncle Horace had reached destination.

Dusty, tired, almost haggard of eye, Mr. Porter-Preston devoted his first seconds to a silent survey of the gathering, while Hapworthy babbled conventional greetings and Mary Callum, finding her welcoming hand ignored, shrank back with a wounded little exclamation; and Aunt Hettie demanded:

"Have you come to join us?"

Uncle Horace shook his head swiftly and glanced at his watch; he wasted no time in greetings nor did he seat himself upon a rock and launch forth into a detailed recital of his tour. Instead, he peered about and asked sharply:

"Where's Jane?"

"Here, uncle," that young woman said. "Uncle, you know Mr. Farnham?"

"How do?" Uncle Horace said briefly and wrung the large young man's hand for a perfunctory instant. "Jane, child, didn't any of my messages reach you? I spent nearly forty dollars in telephoning!"

"*You* were doing that?" Aunt Hettie cried. "Then the Gestling—"

"Of course I was doing it!" Mr. Porter-Preston said, with merciful force. "Most of yesterday I spent calling up garages and post-offices and hotels, between New York and Niagara Falls. They said in Albany that a message had been delivered to you, and that you went on again, and . . . however, I've found you at last!

"Jane, I'll have to talk to you alone; the rest will pardon us. Family business, you know—matter of the estate, all that sort of thing! Come, Jane! I've got to make Albany again and get that one o'clock train down, or—well, *come,* Jane!"

His crooked finger beckoned imperatively and Uncle Horace trudged off, to the far side of the clearing and the little open space that had admitted Jane's car. Here he stopped short and wheeled about; and coming face to face with not only Jane but Wilbur Farnham as well, Uncle Horace's tone cracked to an exasperated little whine.

"My dear Jane!" he said. "If you wouldn't waste time—just this once! I shall have to be back in my office at five o'clock this afternoon or lose—well, I haven't five seconds to spare now. I appreciate Mr. Farnham's society, and so on, but this thing is for your ears alone. It concerns," said Uncle Horace, as Farnham would have moved away and Jane detained him, "Thompson!"

"Mr. Farnham knows about Thompson!" Jane said serenely.

"Is it possible? Do the others?" Mr. Porter-Preston gasped.

"Not a single word, and they do not know that I'm going to marry Mr. Farnham either, but I am," Jane explained, taking little account of the series of highly dramatic starts executed by her Uncle Horace. "And you frightened me so, chas-

ing us that way, uncle. I was sure it must be Thompson and—did he come?"

Uncle Horace managed to draw breath.

"I don't know whether he appeared or not, Jane; there was no sign of him up to last evening, at any rate. That isn't what brought me here, you know. I saw Dresser yesterday morning and told him the whole terrible muddle."

"And he said the marriage wasn't binding at all, didn't he?" Jane asked.

Mr. Porter-Preston smiled oddly.

"That part is immaterial just now," he said. "It appears, Jane, that there is a clause in your father's will which, if I ever heard of it, I had forgotten absolutely. Your portion of the estate goes to you if unmarried on your twenty-first birthday. If you are otherwise, it reverts to your father's university."

"But I'm not married—really!" Jane protested.

Uncle Horace removed his cap and permitted the woodland breezes to cool his weary forehead.

"As a matter of record," said he, "you are. And you'll have to get yourself legally unmarried before noon of next Wednesday, Jane, or lose eight hundred thousand dollars!"

CHAPTER X.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

JANE FAYRE leaned weakly against young Mr. Farnham, who snorted indignantly. Her uncle, having fired his bombshell, resumed his cap, glanced at his watch and sighed heavily.

"What a chase I've had!" he said. "And every minute of yesterday should have been put in at the office and I should have been there at eight this morning, too. Why didn't you stop when you received word from me?

"We thought you were Thompson," Jane told him, "but—"

"And then, after I found that I had lost you at Albany, I got track of you again at Drayton!" the aggrieved Mr. Porter-Preston went on, "I managed to get that machine in Albany last night and the man has been protesting against driving all night and waking people to ask . . . if I hadn't remembered what that freak tread looked like on the road, I shouldn't have overtaken you at all!"

"But about the—the will?"

Uncle Horace cast aside his own troubles with some effort.

"Dresser was unpleasant about that—deucedly unpleasant, to my mind! He said that two copies of that will had been in my safe ever since you came to live with us, Jane, and that he had never mentioned the matter to either of us simply because he assumed that I knew and that you were not contemplating matrimony. He also said that you made a dreadful blunder in keeping the secret so long; it could have been settled months ago."

"And it can be settled now, of course?" Farnham put in.

"That," sighed Uncle Horace, "would seem to depend on a good many things. Dresser said—quite nastily, it seemed to me—that the university would show a much livelier interest in the estate than did the direct heirs, and that if you were a married woman on your birthday and refused to step out of the settlement, the university would doubtless sue."

"But they could never—" Jane began.

"According to Dresser, they might very well," Mr. Porter-Preston corrected. "He said that the court might refuse full credence to your story, Jane, and might hold that while the marriage as a marriage was of doubtful value, the intent constituted a flat violation of the will's provisions, and would cause you to forfeit your entire interest. Then there were seven or eight other things that might happen, I believe; but the meat of the affair is that there's just one safe ground, Jane: to have yourself legally and unquestionably unmarried before next Wednesday."

"I'm more than willing," Jane sighed. "We're going on to Batesford and—"

"You're going to do nothing of the sort!" Uncle Horace snapped. "Jane, can't you understand that every little second is precious now? Dresser said that he'd have to get down on his knees and pray to the court, to get any sort of action on the case in the few days we have left.

"The very first thing of all is to get the man Thompson served with the summons and complaint, or whatever it is. Dresser had his clerk make out—I don't know how many—copies of the thing; here's one of them in my pocket now. Dresser has men rushing all over New York to find Thompson and serve him. And I have hired detectives to locate the Boggs sot and learn from him just where Thompson can be caught!"

His head bobbed most emphatically at the wide-eyed Jane.

"You see, my dear," concluded Mr. Porter-Preston, "if Thompson isn't served before Monday morning—this thing actually put into his actual hand, that is—there's no really solid ground for hope that your fortune will ever come to you. I'm afraid that your party will have to turn around and start back for New York, my dear, or else go on without you."

"You can serve a man by publication, under some circumstances," Mr. Farnham hazarded.

"You can't serve this man that way, because there isn't time," Mr. Porter-Preston said briefly. "Furthermore, Jane will have to be on hand, ready to rush headlong into court at five minutes' notice and give her testimony."

Jane Fayre glanced up at Farnham.

"We'll hurry back," said she. "I'll explain it to them somehow; and—it's queer, but I'm not nearly so frightened at the idea of meeting Thompson now."

She smiled softly and Farnham pressed the hand that had been slipped under his arm; and Uncle Horace, being past any real sympathy for young romance, started back toward the clearing with a grunt. But just beside the car Mr. Porter-Preston paused and looked back impatiently at the pair who loitered after.

"And Jane!" he said, in a low and forceful tone. "I wouldn't waste one minute that can be saved. Just remember that the whole object of your life just now is to catch Thompson while—"

Here, glancing down at Cragg, who tinkered with his new tire, and realizing that Cragg owned ears, Mr. Porter-Preston stopped abruptly and moved on again and Jane moved after him. But Mr. Farnham, murmuring something about having a look at the new shoe, paused beside their driver.

With great reason, Cragg had gained added interest for Mr. Farnham these last few seconds. It seemed to have escaped Jane and her uncle, but the young man's quick eye had caught their driver's strange start, the sudden duck with which his head went down over the tire, the momentary, frightened sidelong glance he shot after Jane Fayre and, more than all the rest, the ghastly pallor of Mr. Cragg's cheek!

"Cragg," said Mr. Farnham.

Again the driver started, muttering:

"Watcher want, boss?"

"I want to know exactly what's the matter with you!" Mr. Farnham inquired, crouching beside him and poking the new tire.

"There's nothing the matter with me," the driver answered faintly.

"Tell that to some one who hasn't been watching you," Mr. Farnham pursued. "What makes you so white, Cragg?"

Swiftly, the peculiar driver's stealthy eye darted toward his questioner and, in rather less than one second, made a thorough study of his countenance.

It was a stern countenance just now, with set chin and penetrating eyes, and one might have fancied that Cragg would have quailed under its steady inspection. Instead, the chauffeur's tension relaxed visibly!

"That's heart disease," he said. "I have spells. I just had one."

"That's a lie!"

"You can ask my doctor," suggested Mr. Cragg, as he tightened a nut.

"And when you tell me the reason for that, you may also tell me why you want to leave this party—and I'd advise you to speed up a little with the recital, or I may be forced to knock it out of you," Mr. Farnham pursued.

This time Cragg faced him squarely.

"You can start anything you like," he said. "A big healthy guy like you and a little shrimp like me with a weak heart! I'll put up all the scrap that's in me, and if the heart croaks me, that's up to you!"

"Well, I—I don't mean—" Mr. Farnham stammered, angrily.

"I dunno what's wrong with this gang," the driver went on steadily. "I think you're all crazy, but it ain't for me to say. I only came along here because Jones asked me to, and I hoped maybe you could get somebody else at Albany. The reason I want to quit is that I ain't in proper health to drive a car, and I want to get home and see my doctor!"

His injured eye challenged Mr. Farnham, and accused him of cowardice and persecution and several other things; and Mr. Farnham, quite certain the smaller person was lying, rose suddenly and growled.

He yearned to take Mr. Cragg by the collar and shake the truth out of him; and at the same time there was always the chance that the man might have been reciting simple fact. It was possible that his heart was weak and—bah!

Mr. Farnham turned on his heel and left the chauffeur twisting monotonously on his wrench. Mr. Porter-Preston had walked to his own car now and was chatting with his driver and comparing watches; but in the clearing Jane Fayre seemed to have become a center of lively interest, and in that more attractive direction Mr. Farnham turned his steps. The case of Mr. Cragg would have to wait.

James Hapworthy, his blue eye rolling at Jane, was saying:

"Oh, that's too bad—having to go back. Still—"

"Still, if it is unavoidable, there's nothing else to be done," Aunt Hettie cut in, with visible relief. "There is nothing that you can sign and send back by Uncle Horace, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," said Jane.

"Then we will have breakfast comfortably and go back slowly," the chaperon planned. "We'll take two days at least and—"

Jane was looking at her Uncle Horace; that gentleman, holding up his watch significantly, beckoned energetically with the other hand.

"Well, come on! Get started!" he called.

"At once?" Jane asked.

"Most certainly at once!" Mr. Porter-Preston shouted, almost angrily. "Every minute that is wasted here or on the road is *gone!*"

Jane smiled at her party.

"He's right, you know—I'm dreadfully sorry, everybody. But this matter is tremendously important and do you mind very much starting back at once?"

"After — after breakfast, of course?" Mary Callum asked, with a trembling, wistful eye.

"I'd like to wait for breakfast, because we're all hungry," Jane smiled.

"But it is to Miss Fayre's interest *not* to wait," Farnham said firmly.

Uncle Horace, to whom seconds were long hours, erupted again.

"I'll start on ahead!" he called. "You folk talk it out. There's a fast train at one o'clock, or within a minute or two after, and I shall get that at Albany. If you move fast enough you may get it, too."

The motor of his hired racer roared out suddenly and Uncle Horace, who knew not how to dally politely when business was concerned, stepped in with a wave of his hand and gave a downward tug at his hat. The heavy machine lurched forward across the road, stopped and backed crashingly through bushes and lunged forward again, this time striking the road with its radiator pointed toward home.

Mr. Porter-Preston's hand went up in farewell—and they were thundering out of sight and the fever of motion caught Jane. Minutes were indeed precious when freedom from John Thompson and the preservation of eight hundred thousand dollars hung in the balance!

"I'm afraid that we shall have to start at once!" she cried. "Let's all pile in and then—"

"But *breakfast!*" Mary Callum put in penetratingly. "I've been working over breakfast almost since daylight, Jane, and everything is cooked and ready and lovely! Let us have breakfast and then—"

A stricken cry rose in the little clearing. Mary Callum, all full of unbelief for a moment, gazed breathlessly at Cragg as that person shuffled tin plates together with no regard for the delicacies he knocked from them, dipped them in water and slammed them recklessly into a case that would need attention later.

She watched him as he snatched it up and hurried to the car, where even now Mr. Farnham and Mr. Hapworthy were doing their best to roll the tent into something like its former neat bundle. Watching him, Mary's heart broke; she tottered to Aunt Hettie, who embraced her and shook her head grimly; she wept, long and hard.

They talked soothingly to Mary as Aunt Hettie led her to the machine, but they talked for no great time. The tent and the blankets, the pots and pans, were strapped on now, if not as Jack Weston's man had arranged them, at least securely enough to remain with the car. The party had climbed back to their places and Cragg was pumping busily; and now he jabbed at the starter and they were on their way again!

As a tour, Jane reflected, this one had been short and, for the rest of them, not very sweet. Aunt Hettie, for the next two years at least, would miss no opportunity to recall it to her memory and to dilate on its more unpleasant features. Poor little Mary Callum, as Jane observed with a startled pang, seemed bent on weeping her way home; and the Hapworthys, if expressions counted for anything, felt that the outing had fallen short of the ideal.

But for herself it was enough to know

that Wilbur Farnham sat within a yard of her.

There was an impression that, as she herself pondered, Aunt Hettie had screamed orders at Cragg once or twice as to slackening their speed, and that Cragg had either failed to hear or had elected to pay no attention.

At all events he was making time now in good earnest. Under the humming motor's spell, endless yellow road fairly tore at them and vanished beneath the car, and a glance behind showed that the landscape had been obliterated in a swirling world of pure dust.

Even more, Cragg was smiling quite humanly for a moment and Jane caught his words to Hapworthy:

"That guy thinks he can leave me behind. He couldn't lose me in that ice-cart he's driving—not in a million years! Why, looka there! That's his dust on top of the next mountain—he got an eight-mile start on me and he ain't two miles ahead now! What a chance he has—what a chance!" and Mr. Cragg added another mile to the speedometer's already thrilling record.

He was chasing Uncle Horace's driver, apparently, and Jane smiled. It was as well, whatever the general sentiment of her uninformed guests; every minute of speed now brought them that much nearer to the one o'clock train and the courts that would set her free.

Avoiding certain accusing eyes which she could feel upon her back, Jane gazed dreamily at the autumn woods.

They had been racing on for countless miles, but it seemed hardly time to be tearing up this particular hill. They had hurtled down it yesterday, of course, for Jane recognized at once the thousands of white birches; they must be traveling even faster than on the wild outward trip!

There was this mountain and another not quite so steep, and then a long stretch of open country with a winding river—and after that the village of Drayton, where the garage keeper had tried to halt them and failed.

With even livelier interest Jane watched the road, for this meant the one o'clock train by a comfortable margin; and there, as they coasted down, was the smaller hill —and, having topped that at cannon-ball speed, there was the open country and the little sparkling river.

And there, by the way, when five miles of river had been disposed of in as many minutes, was the village of Drayton.

If Drayton chanced to be the finish of the race, Uncle Horace's chauffeur had won, for the car was standing outside the post-office now and the driver, alone, was grinning back. Mr. Porter-Preston himself was invisible, but he appeared as Cragg slowed down beside the hired machine.

He strode out of the post-office, dusty and with a puzzled light in his eye. He noted the six's presence with sudden satisfaction, hesitated a moment, smiled apologetically and beckoned Jane with:

"I'll have to speak to you again, my dear. You'll forgive all this mystery, folks? It's a matter which Jane's lawyer instructed me most positively to keep secret."

Absorbed in gathering hair from the atmosphere and rubbing sand from eyes, they did not even hear him, save for Jane and Mr. Farnham, and since the presence of the latter seemed inevitable, Mr. Porter-Preston took an arm of either and led them across the road.

"I thought it better to stop and call up the detective agency on the long distance," he explained. "They've got him!"

"Thompson?" Jane gasped.

"No, the man Boggs, of course. They found him two-thirds drunk—his normal condition, I fancy—and they have him locked up in a hotel. They—dear me! this seems to alter everything," Uncle Horace sighed, as his habituated mind wandered back to his office for a second and was twitched out again.

"What does it alter?" Farnham asked quickly.

"Everything! They've quizzed Boggs and given him the third degree, or something of the kind. He admitted that he had been lying, at any rate. Thompson isn't coming to New York at all, according to his latest statement—he never had any idea of coming, so far as Boggs knows."

"Then how—"

"From what they have been able to learn, Boggs knew about the wedding — they didn't discover how, I believe—and needed money. He conceived the rather simple scheme of blackmailing you, came to the house and tried it and failed; and so far as I could glean from a wire that insisted on buzzing, Boggs had almost forgotten the adventure when they found him."

"But Thompson! Where is Thompson? Has he been served?" Farnham asked.

Uncle Horace shook his head.

"Naturally he hasn't," said he. "From what Boggs said, Thompson belongs in Batesford or thereabouts, and he has never left the neighborhood. He's there still!"

"Then to serve him, some one will have to go to Batesford?" Jane cried.

"Of course, and by the time I've sent to the city for Dresser's men—"

"We needn't!" his niece said brightly. "You've got a copy of the thing in your pocket, uncle. You'll have to go—we'll all have to go—right straight back to Batesford!'

CHAPTER XI.

THEIR LIVES IN HIS HAND.

MR. HORACE PORTER-PRESTON'S eye, resting upon his niece, held all the blank protest of a freshly-hooked fish's. Blank it remained, however, for only the briefest time—and then it kindled suddenly and astonishingly and Uncle Horace exploded:

"*I* go!

"Yes!"

"Well, I can't go! It's impossible! I won't go—I'll be hanged if I go!" Mr. Porter-Preston rasped out savagely. "Jane, have you no conception of what time means to me now, after frittering away a month at your idiotic Newport? Can't you understand that I'd as soon have had a leg amputated as to have dropped everything yesterday? I can't very well stand here and jabber the inner details of a deal that I've been working on for a year, but I will say that if I'm not in the office before five o'clock this afternoon—"

He had quite lost his temper. Mr. Farnham, noting that Jane was the innocent cause, came near to losing his.

"There is no need of berating Jane, Mr. Porter-Preston!" he said stiffly. "Your presence isn't necessary in Batesford, I'm sure."

"Eh?"

"You have a copy of the summons with you; they're all alike, aren't they—one's as good as another, I mean?"

"I—I suppose so," Uncle Horace said more mildly. "Dresser mentioned something about handing him money with it, if he was found out of town."

"Transportation, probably; they do it under some conditions, I believe, although I don't know just when," Farnham supplied. "But that's easily settled; I'll hand him an even hundred when I give him the paper."

"*You* are going to undertake the job?" Mr. Porter-Preston asked, with a sudden and brilliant smile.

"Most certainly."

"You know the man Thompson, when you see him?"

"No."

"Then what if you serve the wrong man?" asked Uncle Horace. "That would never do, you know—that would be the ghastliest thing possible! Because Dresser said most distinctly that unless the defendant *in person* had *positively* been served—and that before court opens next Monday morning—hope was gone!"

Here Jane contributed her helpful bit.

"The same thing might happen to you or anybody else, uncle, because you've never seen Thompson, either. But it needn't happen with Mr. Farnham, because if Thompson is in Batesford I shall be there to identify him."

"He is there, apparently, but—"

"The others are pretty well aware now that something is up," Jane went on quickly. "If Wilbur started up there alone and the rest of us went on home, Aunt Hettie would begin to speculate, and Mrs. Hapworthy as well—and when those two think, they think out loud and they'll start other people talking, which is the last thing we want. Why isn't it better simply to say that you've heard from New York and that it isn't necessary for us to break off the trip after all?"

"And I can go back to the city at once?"

"Of course."

"I think that's a very good idea," said Uncle Horace, as he glanced at his watch. "It isn't necessary for me to stop and help with the explanation?"

"We can attend to that," Farnham assured him.

"Then—hey, you, Barrows—is that your name? Crank her up!"

His driver, who had put in the minutes exchanging insolent and offensive glances with Mr. Cragg, started into activity and set his motor to humming again. Uncle Horace dug deep into his pocket and produced a folded paper; and he was pressing it on Farnham as he stepped into the car and saying:

"I wish you luck, my dear boy, and I

feel sure that you will have it. If anything should happen in the city to make your chase unnecessary, I'll send a wire to you at the Batesford post-office. And meanwhile," Uncle Horace said, and paused impressively.

"Yes?"

"Remember that this is Thursday and that every minute, every second, *counts!*" concluded Mr. Porter-Preston, as he tucked the robe about him. "Go on, Barrows!"

Drowning Drayton's little main street in blue smoke, the obedient roadster shot away—to the end of the street, around the curve and then out of sight, its motor roaring forth Uncle Horace's farewell.

Jane and Mr. Farnham smiled at each other in the causeless way that had become quite a habit this morning; but there was scant time for smiles, and they turned their attention to the six and its occupants.

All three ladies were leaning back rather wearily, but Mr. Hapworthy was missing. A glance into the general store disclosed him standing hungrily as a man at the delicatessen counter wrapped paper about a mountain of sandwiches, and now he came pattering forth with his burden and a complacent smile.

"This is a good time to break the news!" Mr. Farnham said softly. "They probably think they're still on the way home, you know."

His hostess nodded and hurried back to the car, just as sheer starvation was struggling to best good manners and all three ladies were reaching toward Mr. Hapworthy.

"I've good news!" Jane said brightly.

"Horace 'phoned ahead and reserved the stateroom for us?" Aunt Hettie asked.

"Why, no! We don't have to go home at all," said their hostess. "Isn't that nice?"

"But—but I thought—" Mary Callum faltered.

"It was only a false alarm," Jane hurried on. "You see, uncle called up the people about the business, and it can be—er—postponed. So we'll just turn around and jog back to Batesford, or somewhere up that way."

"And if we find just the right camp-site beside a lake, it's possible that we may settle down and do a little fishing," added Mr. Farnham, who had imagination.

"Oh, I hate fishing!" escaped Mary. "I hate to see the poor, helpless little things wriggle!"

Sheer disappointment had all but stricken dumb Jane's Aunt Hettie; she sat back weakly and gazed at the hostess.

"But Jane!" she said. "Now that we've planned to go home — now that all the others have counted on getting home—"

"Why, they haven't counted on it at all, I'm sure!" Jane laughed. "I was so sorry to think that we had to go back, and I'm so glad now that it isn't necessary. Have you plenty of gas and oil, Cragg?"

The chauffeur glanced fearfully at her.

"Maybe ten drops, lady," he mumbled. "I ain't got enough to make another mile on; we wouldn't 'a' got this far if I hadn't coasted the hills."

"Then you'd better take her down to the garage and tank her up," Mr. Farnham said briskly. "I suppose that you ladies will prefer to get out and walk around a little while he's doing it?"

Numbly, mechanically, they responded to Mr. Farnham's suggestion, passing to the porch of the post-office, where several inhabitants of Drayton inspected them with frank curiosity. Mr. Cragg watched Jane until she had joined them; then he turned to Farnham with a quizzical smile.

"Now, boss," said he.

"What?"

"When I get down to the garage there, I gotter get out of this car, you know."

"What of it?"

"I don't want you to think I'm going to climb a tree and jump into an airship or anything like that," pursued the driver with an impudence which, in the light of the recent past, Mr. Farnham could not well resent. "And what's more, I've gotter go into the garage and look over his spark-plugs to see if there's anything I can use on this car. That number three cylinder ain't hit once this last forty miles, and I think the plug is on the bum, because when I looked at it before we started I saw a crack and when a plug cracks—"

"Go and get ready to start!" Mr. Farnham snapped. "Don't sit there talking about it."

Mr. Cragg started his motor and grinned patiently.

"I only wanted to tell you beforehand, boss, so's you wouldn't get excited and jump on me the second I hit the ground," he said. "Y'know, I'm little and I ain't trained down very hard; this thing o' getting banged around like a football leaves a lot of bruises."

Grinning still, he backed around and headed down the street to the garage, and Mr. Farnham gazed after him with heightened color.

It was possible, of course, that he had been unduly suspicious of the little driver and had, in fact, been making rather an idiot of himself. Cragg's present demeanor hinted strongly at something of the sort, and last night Mr. Farnham's nerves had been pitched high.

Nevertheless, he watched sternly as Cragg, hailing the garage and raising a rather dreary looking boy, stepped down with the utmost leisure and indicated by his gestures that he was ordering gas and oil. Thereafter Mr. Cragg looked up the hundred yards of Drayton street and grinned anew at Mr. Farnham—and Farnham scowled and turned back to the socially more elevated members of the party.

They were wholly silent and ravenously busy with Hapworthy's sandwiches. That gentleman, entirely pleased with the favorable atmosphere with which he had surrounded himself, offered the brown paper to Mr. Farnham, and Farnham, too, ate suddenly and thankfully.

Their plain appreciation of the coarse fare brought tears to the eyes of Mary Callum, but their several minds were not upon Mary just now. Four faces indicated plain discontent at the idea of resuming the road in Batesford's direction; Jane Fayre's was all deep and animated thought, and Mr. Farnham's wore a contented grin that held no anxiety for the future.

The present was all sufficient, for he was with Jane!

But sandwiches, even in the prodigal quantities with which Mr. Hapworthy dealt, must come to their end. The last of this supply had vanished and Mr. Farnham had added a happy touch by discovering ice-cold and dreadfully sweet soda-water in the general store before his mind wandered to Mr. Cragg again.

A glance down the road showed no sign of their driver. The boy, having poured a superfluous gallon of gasoline on the outside of the tank, was busy wiping it with cotton waste and Cragg, very likely, was going over the stock inside.

Mr. Farnham rose lazily from the porch steps and said:

"I'll go down and get Cragg into motion. Anybody coming, or do you prefer remaining here?"

Jane rose promptly.

"I'll go," said she. "If they have a mechanic down there I'd like to find out whether we've strained anything so far."

"Well, we have! I'm no mechanic, but I can tell you that!" Aunt Hettie said bitterly. "And Jane, instead of going back to those wretched woods, why not—"

But Jane was already hurrying down the street at Mr. Farnham's side, her smile as bright and happy as the morning sunshine.

For a little she had been quite thunderstruck at Uncle Horace's news, but all that had passed away. The whole situation, you see, was in Wilbur Farnham's strong and capable hands now; there could be no such thing as failure, no chance at all that Jane would lose the fortune she had always considered her own, no real danger from Thompson, who, after all, was not pursuing them.

She was a thoroughly self-possessed young woman who paused beside Farnham to watch the boy.

"Got her filled?" Farnham asked cheerily.

"Yessir!"

"Here's your money," smiled Mr. Farnham. "Never mind the change. Has our man finished his tinkering yet?"

The boy looked up uncomprehendingly.

"He ain't done any tinkering, boss," said he. "How could he?"

"Eh?"

"Why, no, sir, he didn't have a minute to spare as it was," the boy explained. "Pretty tough for a young feller like that to get word that his mother was dying, wasn't it?"

"*What?*" asked Mr. Farnham.

"Yessir, there was tears in his eyes when he asked me about them trains," the boy went on with feeling. "And he was that relieved when he found that he could go right out on the freight that he nearly cried. He says to me, says he—"

"Wait, kid!" commanded Farnham. "Is our driver *gone?*"

"Why—certainly he's gone!" the boy answered blankly. "He said you folks was the finest people in the world to work for, because as soon as you heard his mother was dying you wouldn't hear of him spending another minute in the car with you! He just ran in there, mister, the way I told him, and dropped over the wall, and I seen him swing on board the caboose myself. Yessir, he got off all right without waiting for the passenger train."

With rather fevered eyes Mr. Farnham followed the grimy, pointing finger—and it was all quite clear, painfully clear, indeed.

There, at the back of the garage, was an open door, leading to a yard well cluttered with mechanical odds and ends. At one side rose perhaps two feet of neat, new concrete wall, the extension above ground of the railroad cut's smooth side. By hanging over that visible two feet and dropping another ten, one would have been upon the railroad tracks — quite as Mr. Cragg had been!

Mr. Farnham looked blankly at Jane Fayre; Jane, having spent some seconds in returning a stare equally blank, laughed suddenly.

"I was awfully sorry for that young feller," the boy remarked. "He says to me—"

"Never mind what he said to you!" Mr. Farnham snapped. "Where do we get another driver?"

"Why—I dunno!" the boy answered vaguely.

"We've got to find another man, and quick, too!" Farnham rapped it out so forcefully that the boy started and grew almost intelligent of expression. "The man who owns this place; he can drive? We'll take him until we can find somebody else. Where is he?"

"Up to the county fair," the child replied. "He took to-day and to-morrow off."

"Then hustle around and find me some one else who can drive this make of car, kid, and I'll give you five dollars if he's here in five minutes!"

The boy smiled sadly.

"There ain't anybody else in Drayton can drive a car," said he. "There ain't many cars right in this neighborhood; Dick makes his money offen the road business, y'know, and—"

"Well, where *can* I get a man then?" Mr. Farnham cried.

"Why—tell y' the truth, I dunno!" the boy said blandly. "There was a gent here couple o' weeks ago trying to get a man—he busted his wrist and couldn't drive no further. I suppose he was telephoning here all one day and most of the next before he got anybody; and then he had to take a feller they sent on from Albany an' he had to pay for his time comin' and the rent o' the car that brought him—here an' back, that is—an' the time o' the man that drove him here—here an' back, too—an' he had to pay—"

Mr. Farnham stayed him gently.

"I understand," said he, "but how long did it take the man to get here, once he had been engaged?"

"Why, from around noontime till around eight in the evening, boss. That was pretty good time."

Gazing at his lovely hostess, Mr. Farnham shook his head.

"That means that we'd have hardly a chance of starting before to-morrow morning—and that would mean the loss of a whole day. We can't do it!"

"Of course not," Jane said placidly. "We needn't."

"Eh?"

"*You* drive, Wilbur!" Jane commanded sweetly, quite ignoring his sudden start.

"Well, my automobile driving has been limited to about ten miles, and those ten were not exactly a howling success," said Mr. Farnham—and stopped.

The astonishment, the reproach in Jane's eyes indicated that she had expected more of him!

"Of course, I know the theory of the thing from one end to the other," Mr. Farnham added.

"Yes, and I'm sure that you know what every little button and lever on this car is for, because I saw you watching Cragg."

"If it comes down to that, you're right," Mr. Farnham smiled dubiously. "It struck me on the way here that the little rat might make his escape and leave us flat. In fact, when we came down that last hill I was wondering if I could send her along as he did and—"

"Well, of course you can!" Jane said, all comfortable assurance once more. "There is really nothing at all to it, and what if you do wabble around a little at first? I don't believe that it will take you more than five minutes to learn to drive better than Cragg."

Utter faith shone in her eyes. Looking into them, young Mr. Farnham expanded his chest and squared his shoulders.

"All morning," said he, "I've been wishing for an emergency to rise to—a sort of exhibition emergency, Jane. I guess this is it. What will the rest say?"

"What should they say?" smiled the hostess. "They'll be glad, of course. I'll get them down here and in now, unless you'd rather go up for them with the car."

Mr. Farnham shuddered.

"No, the car's pointed the right way now,

Jane," said he. "I'd rather not monkey with it."

With a grim smile he watched earth's most utterly adorable maiden trip back to her guests; he saw her smile brightly at them and beckon; he saw them rise reluctantly and follow her.

A little voice within told Mr. Farnham that Jane had not mentioned the change of drivers; he stood apart from the car and gazed unconcernedly at the blue vault of the sky as the forlorn little party dragged their way back to their seats. He did not move until he heard Aunt Hettie's:

"That's Mr. Hapworthy's place, in front, Jane."

"I'm going to sit there for a little," Jane said.

Young Mr. Farnham's hideous plans were made. He faced about suddenly and stepped into Jane's car; within two seconds he had adjusted spark and throttle; within another he had produced the grinding swish of the starter; a fourth and, with a hand he felt to be guided by an almost unearthly instinct, he had let out his brake and let in his clutch.

Jane's beautiful car moved forward with a tooth-loosening jerk even before Mary Callum could scream!

It managed another jerk and—doubtless because Cragg had failed to oil the steering gear properly—crossed the road and just missed crossing the fence and the dooryard beyond and dropping into the railroad cut.

But Mr. Farnham brought it about once more and set his teeth. The little inner voice told him that he was about to shear one railing off the railroad cut's little bridge and make the tracks after all; but this time the little voice lied.

One rear hub, be it admitted, did tear loose some yards of railing and draw a dreadful scream from Aunt Hettie; but the car missed going over by a full inch, or even more, and it was with confidence restored that Mr. Farnham shut out from his senses all the world except the road ahead and started up the slight grade.

Behind him they were chattering like so many monkeys—but monkeys miles and miles away. Beside him sat Jane Fayre, who knew that he could drive perfectly. It was enough; had the six been a locomotive and the road been mined with lyddite, Mr. Farnham would still have driven.

The real danger, as appeared within the first two miles, was not to themselves; the real risk of his experiment was being borne by other wheeled things that had wandered afield that bright morning.

There was the buckboard, for one; even as he saw it coming Mr. Farnham knew that he was about to drive straight over horse and man, to leave them as a horrible, crushed tangle. A loud gulp escaped him and he twisted furiously at his wheel; and though the absurd horse insisted on rising with pawing forefeet, and the uncontrollable rear end of Jane's six slapped the buckboard itself out of the road, a little detour into a cornfield and a sweeping, lurching curve back to the highway found them all uninjured.

There was the honest farmer-lad, too, who approached on his bicycle. His eye met Mr. Farnham's and the boy, with a shriek, leaped from his wheel and dragged it into the ditch after him—and not one second too soon.

But presently a certain confidence came to Mr. Farnham. A series of experiments had proved to his mechanical mind that, if one met the steering-gear half way and in a perfectly friendly spirit, the thing would respond quickly enough.

As for the engine, even though it was hitched to a flimsy bed that swung in the air, even though it pulled them along with power enough to move a house, it was only a gas engine after all—and he had known gas engines for years.

Still more, as confidence waxed, Mr. Farnham was pleasantly aware that, no matter how they bumped and bounded and swerved unexpectedly, they were making time. The speedometer had passed the 40 mark and all hands still lived!

Without being quite certain of Batesford's location, he felt that they would make Batesford some time during the evening; even now they were within a mile or two of the clearing where they had passed the night. Mr. Farnham squinted ahead and smiled contentedly; from here he could see the massive rock which would live in his memory to the end of life!

Then, as he sighed gently, the dog appeared.

He was part setter, part pointer and part several other things; he came from nowhere at all and stood in the very center of the road, looking at them with great, stupid eyes.

Quite frantically Mr. Farnham jabbed at

his horn. The dog, gazing at them still, wagged his tail understandingly and moved slowly to the side and—

"Oh, *dear!*" Jane screamed.

With a jerk, Mr. Farnham brought his car to a standstill forty yards ahead.

"Did I—hit him?"

"You went right over his neck!" Hapworthy reported breathlessly. "You rolled him up in a ball, Farnham."

"Well, the poor pup!" muttered the large young man. "I wouldn't have done that for a thousand dollars! He's deader than a doornail!"

Jane, whose lips were pale, smiled faintly.

"It was an accident, poor doggie," she said. "Nobody could have avoided it or—"

That was where Jane ceased speaking; that, indeed, was where all hands forgot the ill-starred canine!

For Mary Callum, emerging from a trance-state that had held her rigid for seconds, drew her breath in a great, noisy, choking gasp. Round eyes dilated with horror, clutching hands aloft, Mary tottered for another second on the edge of that mysterious wall which divides sanity from a less happy condition. Then, piercingly, Mary screamed:

"Oh, the dog! The little dog! The little dog!"

And the woodland rang with her peal of maniacal laughter!

CHAPTER XII.

A SUDDEN STOP.

UP in the trees, birds fluttered excitedly. Jane Fayre clutched at Mr. Farnham's sleeve. Oddly enough, Mrs. Hapworthy clutched her husband as she shrank away from Mary Callum, and even Aunt Hettie turned white for a moment.

Only the unfortunate dog remained unaffected as Mary finished her first peal of laughter; even he might well have stirred when the second split the stillness.

Because, to Mr. Farnham's mind, while the first laugh might have been mere hysterical excitement, the second was plain dementia!

"Ha! ha! ha!" shrieked Mary Callum; and again: *"Ha! ha! ha! ha!"*

There she stopped abruptly and looked at Aunt Hettie. A clawing hand dragged at either side of Mary's head, tearing loose her motor bonnet and setting free her hair as well, so that it floated suddenly about her shoulders and added the last needed touch to her expression as she said hoarsely:

"The dog! The little dog! He killed the little dog! He—ha! ha! ha!"

This time Mary's merriment ended with a scream that chilled Jane's blood. Mary looked at Jane for a moment and shrank against Aunt Hettie; she tore herself away and gazed around wildly; then she burst into laughter again and laughed and laughed until a rain of tears came suddenly and sent her huddling into the corner of the seat.

"I—I guess it's over!" Mr. Farnham said faintly. "I—"

Panting, Mary faced him. Her hands clutched her cheeks and she drew farther from him and still farther, gazing at Mr. Farnham as a condemned soul might gaze at its tormentor!

"Oh, you! *You!* You! YOU!" screamed Mary Callum. "You killed him! You killed him!"

"Well, I didn't do it on purpose!" Mr. Farnham stammered. "I couldn't—"

His words died, for Mary, with another dreadful cry, had thrust her head behind Aunt Hettie and was beating that lady's lap with no gentle hands. Color, however, had returned to the chaperon's cheek; she smiled grimly at Mr. Farnham as she said pleasantly:

"I don't know whether you were born without brains, young man; I've suspected it since having been trapped into riding behind your driving. But one doesn't argue with a girl in Mary's condition!"

"W-what's the matter with her?" Hapworthy stammered.

"Hysterics, of course."

"I know, but what does one do for it?" Farnham asked. "We can't let her go on like this."

Aunt Hettie's smile became even more grim as she restrained Mary's beating hands.

"Generally a little ammonia or a dash of cold water will do," said she, "but it will not do for this child. Her very life has been frightened out by the ride, Mr. Farnham, and that dog settled her. We'll have to get her to a doctor as soon as possible, of course."

It may have been wholly heartless. Again it is quite possible that, with eight hundred thousand dollars at stake, one naturally minimizes a solitary case of hysteria.

At any rate, the glance that passed be-

tween Jane and Mr. Farnham was quite aghast.

"There may be a doctor ahead," slipped from the driver.

"There is certainly one at Drayton," Aunt Hettie said, "for I saw his sign."

"But Drayton—"

"Mr. Farnham, you will return to Drayton or you will assume all responsibility for the loss of this child's reason, if it comes to that," the chaperon said flatly, and rested her case.

"We'll go back, of course," Jane said quickly.

"And if—if you really think she's in danger of losing her mind—why, good Lord!" breathed Mr. Farnham, as he started the motor once more, threw in his reverse and backed about so emphatically that even Mary paused in the middle of a new shriek. "Sit tight, everybody! I'm going to speed her up!"

"Well, not too fast!" Aunt Hettie called.

"If that poor kid stands any chance of going crazy permanently, we *can't* go too fast!" Mr. Farnham shouted, and if he discoursed further on the need of haste his words were lost in the sudden rush of wind.

By this time, of course, he was master of the car—or nearly master, at any rate. For no apparent reason, the thing insisted on lurching from one side of the road to the other every now and then; but while that might be a trifle hard on the springs it did not interfere with the steady forward motion.

Mr. Farnham was learning fast, too, which was well for poor Mary's sake. He recalled Cragg's mention of coasting down the hills and tried it himself with glowing success.

Through one dizzy hour Mary screamed, but during the second sheer lack of breath rendered her screams comfortingly fainter. When he came to the level stretch by the river at last, Mr. Farnham's hair rose; things were almost still behind and he wondered if Mary were really dying and dared not look back.

And now the river was past and the quite familiar hamlet of Drayton lay just ahead. With a vague, unhappy feeling of having returned to a home he detested, the driver stopped with a crash before the doctor's home and beckoned the garage boy, who gaped at him from the garage doorway.

"Fill up those tanks again, kid!" directed Mr. Farnham. "Put in four or five gallons extra in a can, if you have one. Now. How is she?"

She was at least alive. Limply, but screaming doggedly, Mary permitted herself to be lifted from the car and carried into the doctor's house and stretched upon a comfortable leather couch.

There, moaning and looking about with the same horror-stricken eyes, laughing horribly now and then, and again bursting into feeble tears, Mary lay motionless until an expansive set of white whiskers entered the room, immediately followed by their proprietor, the physician.

He considered Mary Callum and asked many questions—and the little clock across the room denoted that the afternoon was passing swiftly. He examined the patient and asked further questions as he mixed a dark and sinister fluid from many bottles—and still the little clock raced on.

Eventually, however, he delivered his verdict.

"Hysteria, of course," said he, "but one of the most violent and exhausting cases I have ever seen."

"Her reason—is that in danger?" Farnham asked anxiously.

The doctor smiled reassuringly.

"In no danger at all, young man—with proper treatment. I am giving her as strong a sedative as I dare. When it begins to take effect, she will have to go to bed and remain there for a day at least."

"But where?"

"Right here, naturally. I have a spare room," the physician said calmly.

"We can't stay here for another day!" Mr. Farnham thought aloud.

"Well, Mary must stay and I *will* stay!" Aunt Hettie said, with sudden and astounding force. "This ridiculous automobile tour has come to an end! Do you hear, Jane?"

"I hear, dear, but—"

"An end!" repeated Aunt Hettie and, glancing at her heaving bosom, the doctor added to the quantity of the dark fluid. "No consideration in this world could ever drag me into that car again, with you driving, Mr. Farnham! I am a patient woman and I will endure much to please Jane; and since yesterday morning I have endured enough to kill a younger and more robust woman, *but this is the end!*"

"Well, if Mary—" Jane began again.

"I remain here, and so do you and the rest!" Aunt Hettie said grimly.

Mr. Farnham sighed.

"We may be exaggerating Miss Callum's trouble?" he asked brightly. "She might be able to go on later in the afternoon, doctor?"

The doctor stared at him and then at Mary, who screamed weakly.

"Yes, sir," said he. "You may take her later in the afternoon—if you wish to kill her!"

"And he is capable of it!" Aunt Hettie observed pleasantly. "Upon my word, I believe that he is capable of it!" She glared at Jane. "Take off your things!"

The hostess glanced appealingly at Mr. Farnham.

"Miss Fayre doesn't want to end the tour," he said gently. "That was an unfortunate accident, of course, but it will not happen again, and it's a shame to spoil her trip."

There was no response. Mr. Farnham smiled suddenly at Mrs. Hapworthy.

"Why, *you'll* be the chaperon, of course!" said he.

"I?" the lady cried harshly. "I'd no more think of riding another mile in that car than I'd think of drinking acid!"

"You're not going to desert us?"

"I have deserted you!" snapped Mrs. Hapworthy.

And just here her husband saw fit to laugh lightly.

"Why, I was enjoying it!" he said. "All that jolly old banging around and ripping through space and all that sort of thing! Seemed exhilarating, you know—shook up the blood a bit. Pity to drop it all just when Farnham's learning to drive!"

"Thank you!" Farnham said, gratefully and desperately. "Then you'll stick to the party at least?"

It may have been mere chance, but Mr. Hapworthy's china-blue eyes rolled momentarily in Jane's direction as he said easily:

"I? Oh, rather! I'm game for no end of that sort of thing!"

The elderly and bewhiskered doctor paused again in his mixing, for this time his attention had been drawn away from the job by the peculiar rattle in Mrs. Hapworthy's throat.

To his medical ear it indicated any one of half a dozen acute pathological conditions, but in simple fact it was no more than the sudden collision of eight or ten assorted and violent emotions. With a cold, an almost evil, light in her eye, Mrs. Hapworthy smiled at Mr. Farnham.

"I will accompany you," she said. "Be sure of that!"

Years of conventional living rose within Jane Fayre, bidding her abandon the chase of John Thompson and all else rather than prod farther, and however unwillingly, into Mrs. Hapworthy's jealous depths.

A moment there rose to her lips a frigid and incisive little speech that would end everything on the spot and leave a yawning chasm between herself and Mrs. James Hapworthy forever more; but she caught Farnham's satisfied eye and his little nod and held her peace.

Across the office, the wicked clock ticked on furiously, checking off lost minutes from the narrow strip of time between now and Monday morning. The physician, having raised Mary Callum's head, was urging his forbidding mixture down her strangling and reluctant throat; and now, with a final gurgle, the last of it disappeared and the medical man smiled benevolently.

"Twenty minutes or so and she will be asleep," said he.

"And she will be quite all right when she wakes?" Jane asked eagerly.

"Quite, my dear young lady."

"And you will be here, dear aunt," pursued the hostess. "There is nothing more that we can do for poor Mary."

Aunt Hettie gazed wonderingly at her.

"You insist on continuing the trip until all hands have been killed outright?"

"Not that, but—"

"Mind, Jane, I shall disclaim every particle of responsibility," said the chaperon. "In just so many words, I forbid you to go on. I shall tell your Uncle Horace that —when it is all over. You, doctor, will be alive at least to bear me witness?"

"I hope so," the physician said bewilderedly.

"Why, nothing at all is going to happen to us!" Farnham laughed boisterously, "and there's no real reason for hanging around here and disturbing Miss Callum. Now that we're quite sure that everything is all right, we'd better get into motion."

Mrs. Hapworthy blanched and shut her teeth. Her husband, who seemed to be enjoying an inning of his own, said cheerily:

"Ready whenever you are, old chap. Good-by, dear ladies—awfully sorry it had to happen, but how luck y it's no worse!"

And he had blazed the path to the outer world again and Mr. Farnham followed after him, with a word of farewell.

Jane Fayre and her surviving female guest joined them outside. Mr. Hapworthy's rising spirit of adventure seemed to be drawing the two gentlemen together; they conferred quite amiably on the matter of food, and ended by purchasing further sandwiches, their second appearance in the same afternoon convincing the dealer that deserved appreciation of his stock was coming at last.

The child of the garage, too, had done his noblest. Tanks were full and ready again, and an assortment of gallon cans stood about the floor of the car's rear half.

Whistling cheerily, Mr. Hapworthy tucked them away carefully and bestowed himself beside his silent spouse with a contented sigh. Whistling cheerfully also, and this time with quite a grasp of the thing, Mr. Farnham turned a professional eye upon his engine, found it good and took his place.

So, for the third time in twenty-four hours, did Jane's expedition, somewhat reduced in numbers, pull out of the hamlet they called Drayton; and a dozen or more inhabitants, feeling themselves acquainted by this time, gathered to wave them farewell.

At least a rather distressing loss of time had come to its end. This should have cheered Mr. Farnham and his hostess vastly; in fact it did nothing of the kind.

Farnham studied the sky and found that the sun was dropping, even now, almost to the edges of the hills. Instead of being almost at Batesford itself, they would be in real luck if they attained the friendly clearing once more before sheer weariness called a halt to the day's journeying.

There was need for all sorts of haste, and Mr. Farnham set about producing it with a nervous eye on the descending sun that did nothing at all to improve his driving.

The road, never of the best, seemed to have grown markedly worse since their last passing; long ruts that had merely pitched them about now managed to worm their way about his wheels and send the big car rocking crazily.

Twice Jane, momentarily startled but no whit less confident in him, exclaimed aloud and caught at Mr. Farnham; many times twice did an irrepressible scream come from the lady behind him, as they lurched up one hill and down the next, roared into dusky woodland patches and out of them again into the gathering twilight.

A native son, plodding afoot beside the road, gave Mr. Farnham the first real impression that driving a car through twilight is downright dangerous.

This person, in the half-lights, seemed a yard or more from their path; yet whether the car jumped viciously at him or its driver's eye erred, the native son leaped wildly into the brush as the mudguard struck him, landed on all fours and remained thus, sending frightful comments through the oncoming evening.

"You mustn't do that again, Will!" Jane said firmly.

"Well, I—"

"No, you mustn't!" his hostess insisted. "That thing of trying to see how near you can come without hitting a thing is dangerous! Jones always said it was, and he knows a lot about a car."

"I'll do better next time," sighed Mr. Farnham, and squinted into the dazzle of white ray that followed his twist of the lighting switch. "Perhaps I'd better slow down a bit?"

"If you—you think we can afford the time," Jane said doubtfully.

She herself, it was plain, felt that they could not, and she was quite right, Mr. Farnham reflected. There was always the chance that they would run straight through to Batesford to-morrow, find Thompson at once, serve him and be gone again; but there were a thousand less encouraging possibilities.

What if Thompson were not there at all? What if they had to chase him for days, even? Was it legal to serve a man with a summons on Sunday?—because if it wasn't, that left them only about one day in which to accomplish the mission.

And what if this complicated piece of machinery should break down here in the woods? An engineer of some prominence in his own line, Mr. Farnham understood perfectly the wide space that lies between gas engine theory and practical repairing.

Assuming that this superb piece of mechanism stopped short and refused to move, he could in time study out the trouble, but it would be only by taking it down, bit by bit, learning the function of each individual chunk and, in the course of days very likely, locating the defective one!

Again, it was thinkable that some part might go entirely to smash, for the car had been doing heavy duty these many hours. What if it happened to be a part for which

there was no duplicate in the toolbox? Would there be a telephone within even half a day's walk of the wild spot where they might stop?

Well indeed was it that they had cast conventionality to the winds, lugged the awful Hapworthy pair with them and pursued their way! Better would it have been if Mr. Farnham had had a little practice at night driving before undertaking the task, for the headlights seemed to distort even the smallest objects, causing him to lunge over here and then over there, by way of avoiding obstacles no larger than an onion!

Somewhere in this neighborhood, Mr. Farnham felt sure, was the little clearing they had occupied last night; and when they came to that he would steer in, breathe a devout prayer of thankfulness for their safe arrival and then—

"Look out!" Mr. Hapworthy shouted into his ear.

"Huh?" snorted Mr. Farnham.

"Oh, Wilbur! Look out! He turned out to the left!" Jane screamed, almost as a single word.

Roused from the formulation of his premature prayer, Mr. Farnham cast his wild eyes on the illuminated stretch and caught his breath.

It was a farm wagon of some sort and it was not fifty feet ahead even now and occupying most of the road. The time had come for a lightning stop!

Mr. Farnham essayed it by dragging furiously at his emergency brake—which somebody had thoughtlessly removed—and pounding simultaneously on his clutch-pedal and foot-brake. Curiously enough, both these useful bits of mechanism had been spirited away, too, but he struck the accelerator pedal squarely.

With the forward bound of a charging lion, Jane's beautiful six hurtled fairly at the center of a wide board wagon-back.

And a crash, as of a falling skyscraper, rent the calm night! And then, since their top was down and there was nothing to hinder, Jane's lazy little joggers started on a trip to the moon!

Out in the starry reaches, as he rose, Mr. Farnham glanced at the dusky shape that was his lovely hostess, and found her sailing even more swiftly than himself. His dazed hand reached toward her—and the stars vanished and the ground rushed up at him.

A thud, mercifully soft and sliding, preceded his own personal thud by perhaps the thousandth part of a second; and there were other thuds in the neighborhood and the sound of galloping hoofs. Then Mr. Farnham sat up and fumbled at the metal thing he clutched so energetically.

It chanced to be their little gasoline stove, forgotten that morning, and he knew that, even again, they were in the homelike little clearing.

CHAPTER XIII.

NARROWING DOWN.

THE first word to leave Mr. Farnham's lips, as full consciousness rushed back upon him, was:

"Jane!"

"I'm—here!" the owner of the name said faintly.

"Are you hurt?"

"I think not—I'm sure I'm not," said the dear, familiar voice. "But the others—oh, the others!"

Almost beside her a sharp laugh sounded.

"If you mean me, except that half my skin has been torn off, I am quite all right!" Mrs. James Hapworthy said breathlessly. "James, I presume, is over there?"

No answer came from out the stilly night.

"Why, where is Happy?" Mr. Farnham cried anxiously. "I can't see anything, but I don't feel him anywhere around here."

Far to the left, then, there was a scraping and a groaning, as a reluctant human form dragged itself to a sitting posture.

"I am—here!" announced a thin and subdued voice from which every trace of jauntiness had departed.

"Hurt?" Farnham asked, scrambling to his feet and shaking the lurking mists from his brain.

"No bones are broken, if that's what you mean," the faint tone answered. "There is not a square inch of me that isn't bruised. I—I struck on one side, then bounced to the other."

Aided by strong hands, Jane had risen now and Mrs. Hapworthy was standing beside her, breathing heavily. Farnham voiced the shaping thought in four heads as he cried:

"Well, that's the luckiest automobile accident on record! Not one of us was even knocked senseless."

From the depths of the gloom toward the road new sounds of stirring issued. There came a loud growl and a snarl; and then:

"Lucky for who?" rasped a nasal voice.

Jane gasped.

"It must be the man who—"

"This is the man that owns the wagon you smashed to bits!" the voice snapped. "Which one o' you owns that car?"

"Well, I—" Jane began.

"Let me deal with him," Farnham whispered quickly. "Any man whose business sense keeps the upper hand after a bump like that is too much for any girl to handle."

"One o' you wimmen say that car was her property?" the unpleasant voice snarled briskly, as its owned shuffled uncertainly to them and stopped.

In the starlight little more than his outline was revealed, but that was expressive. The person who had been in the wagon was short and thickset, with broad shoulders and a head thrust forward; just now he stood, all uninjured as the rest of them, with hands upon his hips, trying to see them in the gloom.

"I'll talk to you, Mr. ——?" Farnham said soothingly.

"Cook," snapped the other.

"Mr. Cook, then. It was an accident, you see, and—"

"So I took it; who's going to pay the damages?"

"If there are damages—" Mr. Farnham began again.

"Well, there are! You smashed my wagon to flinders and a load of turnips went with it. I lost my team and you durned near killed me. Who's going to pay?"

"If you'll just calm down for a minute or two we'll find out who is going to pay and how much," Farnham answered crisply. "You were on the wrong side of the road and you're not going to bluff a ten-cent piece out of this outfit, and at the same time we're ready to pay anything that is reasonable. Let's make sure first that your property was injured."

Mr. Cook snorted loudly and turned back to the road; silently Farnham followed him —and be it said that while the Hapworthys lacked any inclination to do likewise, Jane Fayre came near to lacking the courage. A hoodoo worthy of Cousin Harold's best astrological efforts seemed to be resting upon them this day!

Unaffected by its presence, however, Farnham reached the roadside prepared to deprecate the whole episode—and having reached it he stopped and caught his breath. Whatever the original value of Mr. Cook's property, belittling the damage it had sustained would be difficult.

Jane's car, mercifully, seemed to have suffered very little. One of the headlights had retired from active business, but the other burned brilliantly; one mud-guard was bent and the fender showed a curve that was not of the maker's designing.

But somewhere in the excitement Mr. Farnham seemed to have stopped the motor, for spark and throttle were shut off, and unless the one or two small dents in the radiator affected its running, the six was ready to start on further adventures! With more than a little satisfaction Mr. Farnham was considering these things when the victim snapped:

"Kinder hard to say how much my property was injured, ain't it?"

He pointed dramatically at the ground and Mr. Farnham frowned in the same direction. Fragments of board were there, to the number of several dozen; and, now that he came to look more closely, there were turnips, apparently, to the number of several millions.

Turnips, indeed, were the predominating theme of the roadway at present—although, some yards along, a pair of rear wheels and a perfectly good axle revealed themselves. And that was really all!

"That's a brand new wagon gone and my whole late crop o' turnips—sold they was, too, for the best price I've had in years. And them hosses was four-year-olds, mister, and the finest pair in this end o' the State!"

"They're not dead, are they?" Mr. Farnham muttered.

"They will be when they've run 'emselves out after that scare," the other assured him. "That ain't counting the damage to me, neither! It ain't any fault o' yourn that I ain't in a thousand pieces this minute!"

Farnham meditated upon the contents of the wallet in his inner pocket and speculated upon the probable amount of cash that Jane Fayre might be carrying.

"I understand," said he, quietly. "You're not injured, so we can check that off. A man with no more sense than to turn out in the wrong direction's lucky to be alive, anyway. As to the horses, they're probably unhurt, too, my friend. They'll run till they're tired, and when they've cooled off, they'll be as good as ever. You know that as well as I do. If they should happen to be injured in any way, we can settle for that later."

"Do what?" the small man snarled.

"Settle for it later," Mr. Farnham repeated, with a stern smile.

"Settle for it *now!*" Mr. Cook corrected. "You didn't wait for no 'later' to hit me!"

"So just omit the outraged stuff—which doesn't impress me a bit, by the way—and let's hear your views on the damage done to your wagon. Well? How much?" Farnham asked calmly, thrusting a suggestive hand into his pocket. "This is spot cash, you know."

Mr. Cook's angry breath was drawn in with a whistle.

"You don't figger on paying anything for killin' a team o' hosses or injuring me, I take it?"

"Not a cent!" Farnham said cheerfully.

"Have it your own way, then, and call it what you like," Mr. Cook laughed harshly. "You gimme a thousand dollars cash and I won't sue you for ten thousand!"

"Give you—what?"

"One thousand dollars, spot cash—and you're getting off cheap."

"That," said Mr. Farnham, "would seem to be altogether a matter of the viewpoint. I'd meant to offer you one hundred, but I'll stretch a point and give you one hundred and fifty, if you take it quick. That covers everything, you know, and you sign a quit claim on the spot."

This time Mr. Cook came quite close to Mr. Farnham.

"Mister," said he, "this county's been plumb infested with you reckless, butchering scoundrels, tearing up the roads and killing people and stock and I dunno what else; and when I heard that thing hit and felt myself flying through the air, I swore solemn that I'd get the last penny out of the man that owned that car, if I lived to do it.

"And a couple of minutes back I felt the same way until I see they was ladies in the party and they was pretty well shook up, and then I says to myself that mebbe, for their sakes, I'd better let you down easy and I done it. But I ain't usually as patient as all that, mister, and if you get me mad I won't feel the same way very long. You hand over that thousand before I lose my temper, or I'll sweat you through the courts till you ain't got one red cent left t' call your own!"

To some extent Mr. Farnham misjudged his man. He smiled superciliously.

"One-fifty," said he. "And I have a temper of my own, by the way. I want to do the right thing, and even a little bit more, but if you try putting over any more of that tiresome tommyrot, you'll not get so much as a plugged nickel!"

"Mister, do you mean that?" the injured one inquired emotionally. "You honestly think you can get out of this crime for a hundred and fifty dollars?"

"I know it!"

"Well, by—by—" began Mr. Cook; and then, perhaps remembering the ladies, he failed to finish the utterance.

Instead, he walked straight to the front of Jane's car, bent low and squinted. Matches came from his pocket; he struck one of them and squinted more closely, and then he rose with a jerk.

"G 1200!" said he, savagely. "I guess that'll be about all, mister!"

Another jerk and his back was toward Mr. Farnham and his heavy tramp sounded suddenly, as Mr. Cook, with shoulders square and hands swinging, moved straight down the path of white light, walked to the end of it and vanished in the inky night that lay beyond!

More than a little astonished, Farnham stared after him, waited through several vain minutes for Mr. Cook to change his mind and return. But the heavy tread died out at last and Mr. Farnham shrugged his shoulders and started back for the clearing.

"He wouldn't talk reason," he reported briefly. "He'll be back later, I think. I'll see if the car is still in running order and bring it in here."

"And then set up the tent," Jane said wearily.

"Of course, in a jiffy! You're tired!" Mr. Farnham muttered, with deep concern.

"I'm so tired—" Jane confessed.

"But *I* am not!" Mrs. Hapworthy put in spitefully from the shadows. "Really, I cannot recall ever having felt more thoroughly refreshed and rested than at this moment! James, if he has life enough left to talk, will assure you that he feels as I do!"

"Well—of course," Mr. Farnham said soothingly. "It has been a hard day, but we'll all sleep just that much better. I'll rush—"

"Sleep in that wretched tent, do you mean?" Mrs. Hapworthy cried.

"Or outdoors, if you like. We've got robes to spare now and—"

"Well, we—James and I—will not sleep,"

the pleasant lady continued. "I supposed that, after this last dreadful crash, this terrible tour was at an end, but—oh, dear!"

Her voice broke. Her husband spoke in a colorless tone quite unlike his own, but grim and dogged nevertheless.

"Never mind, Norma," said he. "Don't cry. We can leave very shortly, I am sure. I've been thinking."

"Why, you can't *leave*—" Farnham began.

"Oh, yes, we can leave," Mr. Hapworthy corrected. "I'm through, you know. I had an idea this afternoon that I was enjoying your driving, Farnham, and the speed and the risk and all that sort of thing; but what was left of that idea was knocked out just as I hit the ground. I'm going to get a rig."

"You can't."

"I can. There must be a rig somewhere in the world that I can hire and that will take us to a railroad train and home again, and I'll find it. I want to get my wife out of this while she's still whole," the dogged voice insisted. "I want to get out of it myself. I'll find a rig somewhere."

"But there isn't a house in miles," Jane protested. "And in the morning, when we have all rested—"

"Well, I'm going to walk the miles, then, Miss Fayre, and I don't want to rest here, thank you," said the stubborn Mr. Hapworthy. "It's idiotic, I suppose, but I have a feeling that Farnham might drive the car over us or explode the gasoline, or something like that. I'm going now."

"And no matter what you have to pay, James, bring something back!" his lady cautioned.

Mr. Hapworthy laughed wanly.

"Don't worry, Norma," he said. "If I can find a live horse and anything on wheels before I drop, I shall return with them. Good-by, all!" and Mr. Hapworthy tottered toward the road, a man rather weak and battered in the flesh, perhaps, but with a new and iron spirit.

His steady, shuffling step rustled through the undergrowth and struck the roadway. For a moment they saw Mr. Hapworthy in the headlight's reflection, as he paused, caressed his doubtless burning forehead and looked about, north, east, south and west. Then he was gone, and Jane addressed his wife in a small, forlorn, almost choking voice:

"You are not—not going to leave me?"

"That, Miss Fayre, is a matter for your own decision," said Mrs. Hapworthy's icy tone, and the owner of the tone withdrew to the deeper shadows.

In his own fashion Wilbur Farnham strove to comfort Jane, assuring her that by no possible chance could Mr. Hapworthy find a conveyance where none existed—that even if he located a human habitation in this wilderness, its occupants would surely refuse to arise and go forth into the night with him.

His hostess merely nodded wearily, and at last Mr. Farnham set about running in the car and pitching the tent.

A sturdy collection of machinery and one which cherished no feeling of vindictiveness toward him, the big motor hummed pleasantly under his touch, permitted itself to be backed around and finally drew up in the clearing; and since Jane was huddled down upon a rock, Mr. Farnham drew one of the blankets about her, sought to thrust upon her a somewhat desiccated sandwich and busied himself with the tent.

Its framework and its sections, this time, were as he had arranged them earlier in the rushing day. He assorted them with ease and set them up; he spread robes upon the ground and approached Mrs. Hapworthy.

"Dear lady," said Mr. Farnham, in a voice of honey, "you've had to stand a lot—we all have—but we'll have better luck tomorrow. You're not going to quit us, and you're only making yourself miserable over here in the dark. Why not roll in and sleep until morning, like a good, reasonable little woman?"

There was no response.

"Won't you?" pleaded Mr. Farnham.

"Sir!" the lady said tensely. "If I were to spend even one more minute with this crazy party than was absolutely, unavoidably necessary, I should—no! NO!"

It was perfectly final; Mr. Farnham felt that and turned away with a sigh and a rather tart smile.

By Jane's side he paused, but no invitation to slumber was necessary here, for Jane looked up with a dreary:

"Is the tent ready, Wilbur?"

"All ready, dear."

"You will not mind if I—I leave you?" Jane sighed. "I'm so tired that I can't even think."

"Don't think, child," said Farnham, as he guided her tenderly to the shelter. "Just sleep and leave everything else to me."

Yet, once under the canvas, slumber did not overwhelm Jane Fayre at once. Advising her not to think was well enough, but there seemed to be food for much unpleasant thought just now.

With all its stops and starts and rushings back and forth, her quite remarkable tour had reached a crisis. There was always the chance, of course, that Mr. Hapworthy would return, baffled in his search for a vehicle; there was the chance, too, that his lady might eventually decide to rest and might awaken in happier frame of mind.

But putting these possibilities aside, what if Mrs. Hapworthy did leave? The social codes of this great country sanction much freedom of action, but she could hardly continue unchaperoned to wander the woods with Wilbur Farnham.

And if she did not go on with him, what then? He might come to Batesford and find a Thompson, who was large and answered the fiendish Thompson's general description and was still not her Thompson at all! He might serve him and return to New York, conscious of a task well executed; and when in court it appeared that the right man had not been served her chance of legal freedom before Wednesday would be definitely shattered.

Nor did even the money matter so very much. As the wife of a burglar she could not marry Wilbur Farnham; what if he decided, after all, to go to Europe and stand in the way of bursting shells and have himself thoroughly killed and . . . here the gloomy train of thought detached itself gently from Jane's weary brain.

But its major conclusion clung fast to the brain. Jane, stirring and protesting after a long, long time, understood mistily that she *must* go on! Thrice she shook off the unwelcome hand before Mrs. Hapworthy's voice penetrated the fogs of slumberland with a crisp:

"Come, Miss Fayre! Come!"

Jane merely murmured incoherently.

"Come!" the lady repeated. "James managed to hire a buggy, thank fortune! He is waiting now and we can get to the railroad at Bramville in time for the six o'clock train, the man said. Come!"

"I'm not—not going with you!" Jane said.

"You will remain with—*oh!*" said Mrs. Hapworthy.

It was an "oh!" of hideous significance, too. So much Jane appreciated and strove for words that would explain everything, while explaining nothing, and convince Mrs. Hapworthy of the need of her own presence.

"Well! Very well, Miss Fayre!" concluded the lady, before Jane had even attained a starting point, and with a swish she had removed her scandalized presence from the tent.

"If you will—will just wait a minute," Jane began.

"Come, James," Mrs. Hapworthy's voice called across the clearing. "You and I are going *alone!*"

When the buggy had crunched away, the plain horror of the thing overcame Mr. Farnham, descending upon him with a rush that sent him to the edge of the road, where he scowled at the swaying light and swore energetically under his breath. The light jogged on steadily, away and away, and eventually Mr. Farnham picked up the lantern and strode to the tent, for Jane must be quite mad.

He would gain her permission first, which would take perhaps two seconds, and within the next he would tear after the Hapworthys and their infernal buggy and drag it back until Jane could make ready to accompany them.

The end of the tent was open. Mr. Farnham thrust in his lantern and prepared to deliver one of the shortest and most convincing little speeches of his life—and he failed to utter a single word. Exhaustion, utter and complete, had claimed Jane Fayre once more!

Tight rolled in her blanket, disordered of hair, more lovely than ever, Jane slept the sleep of the just, oblivious alike to convention and hunger and Thompsons and everything else in the world.

Mr. Farnham, having considered her for two long minutes, withdrew his lantern and extinguished it, thereafter to stroll to the car and stretch himself on the wide back seat.

Henceforth apparently, he alone was in full charge of Jane and her adventure! He thrilled and assured himself that, tired or otherwise, he would close never an eye in sleep while she was there to be protected. He sighed and wondered just how their joint wandering might be explained to a possibly inquisitive public.

There were half a dozen ways of accomplishing that, however. The sleepless

one turned from that aspect of the case to a review of the lively day that was gone; and out of it all, somehow, stood the matter of Cragg.

What had possessed the diminutive chauffeur to escape? Why had he lied and paled and trembled when Jane was near? Why had he quailed before Jane's eye—when any sane person must have warmed at the joyful realization that the eye deigned to rest upon him?

To some extent, Mr. Farnham settled the matter by telling himself that Cragg had a better job waiting elsewhere and, like many of his kind, felt constitutionally unable to tell the simple truth and ask his release—although that did not explain everything.

And then that appearance of Jane's marriage certificate!

Now that he had ample time to consider it, with the rest of the wakeful night ahead, the mystery of the bit of paper impressed Mr. Farnham even more forcefully than the Cragg proposition. Whence had come that accursed document? Had Thompson actually passed in the night car, twenty-four hours ago? Had the certificate chosen just this spot to leap from his pocket?

Such bits of impossible coincidence have actually occurred and inscribed themselves upon the record.

Mysteries apart, however, one concrete set of facts lay before Mr. Farnham.

Not two days back a rather silent, conventional young man, cherishing a love affair he fancied perfectly hopeless, he had been fairly hurled into Jane Fayre's life—nay, he had even taken full charge of the girl herself and of her future! When one came to think of it, it was all rather staggering, although it did not stagger Mr. Farnham just then for he had at last located a really comfortable spot on the big cushioned seat.

He slid down farther and tucked his hands behind his head; through the long, still hours ahead, he would have to plan, detail by detail, this serving of Thompson, picking out all possible accidents and settling in advance just what he would do when this or that emergency arose. For example, suppose that Thompson—

High aloft in a treetop, an owl, pausing for a few reflective hoots before he moved on to his dinner engagement, wondered at the deep and regular snarl which issued from the automobile below. Distinctly a bird of the wilds, he had no means of knowing that the sound was only a healthy human snore.

CHAPTER XIV.

BREAKFAST AND A SHOCK.

JANE started up with a little cry. Not only was the day well advanced, but she seemed to be altogether alone in the tent; Aunt Hettie and Mary and—another, smaller and more dismayed cry escaped Jane and she huddled down again.

There was no more Aunt Hettie, no more Mary, no more Mrs. Hapworthy, with all her faults. Henceforth the prestige of her sex, in this particular motoring party, must be supported by herself alone; deserted by its other representatives, she was quite alone in the wilderness with Wilbur Farnham!

Minute after minute, Jane stared numbly at the crowding wall of her shelter and felt the soul shrinking within her. Minute after minute, then, she became more and more aware that this shrinking was departing and hard common sense, painfully mixed with gloom, was taking its place!

More than mere conventionality was at stake here; there was a fortune involved and her personal freedom and—a dreary, dismal something whispered to Jane that both were lost. She wondered at the utter pessimism, too; yet the true cause of this insinuated itself into her consciousness after another two or three minutes.

Surpassing any similar craving in all her past life, Jane was hungry!

Yesterday, she recalled with amazing vividness, they had lived upon a handful of sandwiches, and a small handful at that, meanwhile burning up physical and nervous energy at an unprecedented rate. This morning—Jane sniffed suddenly.

The crisp air of the woodland gave no tiniest hint of cooking coffee; absent, too, was the heartening frizzle and sizzle of bacon; and, now that she came to note it, the absence of sound was rather remarkable.

Mr. Farnham must be stirring by this time; was it possible that he had tramped away at dawn in search of a makeshift chaperon for their lessened party? It would be rather like him, but—Jane rose suddenly.

A swift and heavy step was crunching through bushes and now across pine needles nearer at hand. It paused beside her tent, and Mr. Farnham's big voice called:

"Jane!"

"I'm awake," announced his hostess.

"You'd better hurry, dear—it's after half-past ten," the voice said apologetically. "I don't know what ailed me, but I never woke up until half an hour ago. We'll have to move if we're going to get into Batesford to-day and find our man. Your bag's right outside the tent, Jane."

And the heavy step moved off quickly, this time, doubtless, to lead its owner's hand to breakfast preparations, Jane assumed as she hurried out, discovered Mr. Farnham's back turned considerately upon her dishevelled self and raced away to the brook.

Privately, Jane knew that Mr. Farnham could cook wonderfully and that only modesty had prevented his communicating the fact before. And if not really wonderfully—well, at least, he would cook far more appetizingly than had the unfortunate domestic scientist.

It was curious, almost shameful in fact, but Jane's mind just now seemed unable to cope with anything but the prospect of real food!

Presently she examined her reflection in the limpid pool, smiled eagerly—at the reflection apparently, but actually at the thought of breakfast—and hurried back to the gentleman in the clearing.

Mr. Farnham turned and beamed on her as he said cheerily:

"I hope you're not very hungry, girl?"

"I'm starving to death!" Jane replied.

The sight of her, apparently, was diverting Farnham's mind to other channels. He ceased beaming and considered his hostess for a little, then he seated himself on the step of the car and frowned at the ground.

"Jane, dear," he said quite soberly, "you know, we're in a rather unconventional pickle here."

"I—know," Jane assented rather faintly.

"I can't imagine what possessed that infernal woman to tear off like that, unless she did it for pure spite!" Mr. Farnham went on. "However, she is gone and—well, it's all right anyway, you know. We'll have your Thompson before night and then I mean to send you home on the train and drive this thing down alone."

"Very well, Wilbur."

Her tone was meek. The large young man smiled his complete reassurance.

"I've been thinking it all out, and if you can stand it I fancy that going straight ahead and finishing the business as soon as possible is the only course open to us. As for the way the rest of creation may regard this expedition, I don't know that it matters very much.

"The odds, I should say, were at least ten thousand to one against our meeting anybody either of us knows. This part of the State is miles and miles from any of the usual motor tours. . . . And I thought that later in the day, when we come to a telephone, I might call up your Aunt Hettie, back there at the Drayton doctor's, and see if she hadn't relented enough to come after us and take her place again."

Jane nodded without a hint of conviction.

"But supposing that we have to go it alone, we'll satisfy the general public simply and easily. Our name, dear, is Fenwick!"

"*Our* name?"

"You're my sister now, Jane—you may not have known it, but you dropped into that relation about an hour ago," Mr. Farnham grinned apologetically. "Jane Fenwick. I am William Fenwick. It's clear luck that both our names begin with the same letter, but that Fenwick will cover the initials on our luggage. Henceforth, whatever else happens, keep that in mind, dear—you are Jane Fenwick!"

To Jane he seemed almost tiresomely insistent on the point; usually the most capable and flattering of listeners, her attention just now persisted in wandering back to the big tin case that was their commissary. And since Mr. Farnham had entered a new period of thought now, Jane brought him gently from it with her almost pathetic:

"And about breakfast, Wilbur?"

Young Mr. Farnham, rousing suddenly, sought to throw a wealth of good cheer into his smile.

"Yes, indeed, dear!" said he. "Do you know, I had some idea of rustling up a meal myself before you were awake and surprising you."

"Then since you didn't, we'll rustle it up together now," Jane said animatedly. "It can't possibly be any worse than the things poor Mary did."

Jane's principal guest, of course, should have leaped at the tin case and laid it open between them; instead of this, he remained quite still and smiled sadly.

"We can't," said he. "I've been digging through the whole collection and there isn't even a scrap of food left. Mary must have used up every last thing Jack packed for us; there's not even a slice of bacon."

"But Wilbur—"

"So we'll have to give up the idea of a cooked breakfast—which is what I wanted to break first and gently to you," chuckled Mr. Farnham. "But we needn't go quite hungry. Can you stand the sight of sandwiches again, Jane?"

"Where are they?" Jane asked simply.

Mr. Farnham rose with a happy laugh.

"Hidden," said he. "So many things had happened up to that time, that when it came to buying sandwiches again yesterday, I took the man aside and had him make up a special emergency package, and it is as well that I did. Hapworthy made a raid on the visible supply last night just before they left; his wife insisted on it and I couldn't beat him off without waking you. But the ones I cached were the best of the bunch!"

Mr. Farnham spoke quite complacently as he opened the back door of the car.

Jane drew nearer.

"I don't know just what they're serving in breakfast sandwiches this season," Mr. Farnham rumbled on pleasantly, as he turned his attention to the studiedly careless pile of odds and ends in the corner, "but these are mostly fresh cream cheese and tongue and ham, and they're all nice and thin and all done up in heavy waxed paper. . . . and they'll be a great big improvement on yesterday's breakfast.

"I hate to say such a thing about people who ought to be charming, but I believe we lost our hard luck when we lost that Hapworthy atmosphere, Jane. Hereafter everything will be swift, smooth, lovely and satisfactory. Yesterday was our hoodooed day, but to-day—"

His voice trailed off as he bent lower. Jane waited through one long polite minute; and then, since they were in the real wilds and necessarily more elemental than usual, she asked with eagerness unconcealed:

"Haven't you found them yet, Wilbur?"

"Well—er—Jane," said Mr. Farnham, as he straightened up slowly. "As a matter of fact—no!"

"Hapworthy took them?"

"Squirrels took them," sighed the large young man, as he pointed to the pile of paper scraps and crumbs that alone remained to testify of a breakfast that was no more. "That must have been the rustling that woke me once or twice about dawn."

He tried to smile whimsically. Coming face to face with Jane's expression just now he could not smile at all; there was that in the expression which, to Mr. Farnham's mind, told her whole story without a single word.

"Why, you poor child!" he cried. "If you're as hungry as all that—"

"It—it isn't just hunger," Jane faltered. "And I suppose it's silly, but—I wish you hadn't said that about losing our hoodoo."

"Eh?"

"Because those sandwiches going seems almost like an omen for this new day!"

Mr. Farnham's head came up with an angry jerk and he slammed the door of the car.

"It's nothing of the kind," he said, "and I was an idiot to say such a thing. Your whole trouble is that excitement and irregular meals and everything else are turning that poor little imagination feverish and—don't you worry!"

Mr. Farnham leaped at the tent and tore it bodily from the earth and began to gather its folds even before the last peg had been jerked free.

"We'll jam some food and some sanity into *this* day so fast that you'll never see them coming! . . . It can't possibly be more than two or three miles to the nearest farm house, and once we're there we'll start the day right!"

There was something very reassuring about him; watching him from her seat in the car, Jane felt hope returning swiftly. Five minutes of this rapid motion and their camp would be broken; and even now the tent had been piled into the back of the machine as a shapeless huddle and Mr. Farnham was pouring their spare gasoline into the tank and hurling away the empty cans with a blithe word of farewell for each.

When presently he bounded into the car and reached down for the starter, Jane thrilled with confidence and perfect faith in Mr. Farnham's ability to do everything that must be done—for such is the resiliency of youth and its capacity for forgetting the unpleasant past.

And now, their forgiving engine running sweetly as ever, they had backed from the clearing and into the road; and Mr. Farnham paused and gazed at that familiar open space with an eye that was almost fearful.

Thrice already they had attained that spot without being able to advance another yard toward Batesford; once weariness had

stopped them and once a dog, and once a load of turnips. He caught his tongue just as it was about to dwell upon these things. He shut his teeth and started the car; and, in a matter of ten seconds, he cried:

"Three times and out, Jane! We're past it!"

At that daring remark, he felt instantly, the car should stand on end and refuse to budge another inch. It did not. Humming happily as it gathered speed, the big six rushed on through the keen morning air, and after a little a sensation of profound satisfaction came to its driver; he had been right, after all, and the hoodoo was broken!

As scenery, the country presented nothing wonderful, unless one happened to be tremendously enthusiastic about millions of the trunks closely packed together. Miles they covered and more miles, while the sun climbed to its noonday altitude and Mr. Farnham's keen eye watched for a cozy farmhouse with a curl of hospitable smoke rising from its chimney and a kindly-faced farmer's wife to welcome into her spotless kitchen, where her simple, happy family, with their honest, next-to-nature expressions, would be grouped about a board which groaned with plain, delicious fare.

But the woods were thinning out now and still there was no sign of human habitation. And here—why, here was a cultivated field!

"Well, unless they spend their days going back and forth in automobiles, somebody *has* to live near this!" Mr. Farnham declared grimly.

Onward the lonely road led them and still onward, past other fields, some planted in the season gone and some of sapling growth; but as they approached the sharp turn it grew plain that wide-open country lay just ahead. Mr. Farnham, suspecting a steep hill, slowed down cautiously—and the little remnant of Jane's motoring party raised its joint voice in sudden admiration of the prospect that had been all but hurled at their senses.

They overlooked a wide and apparently fertile valley. Farther along were other patches of woodland, but most of the country seemed farm. One roof was in sight, far off to the right, and another far off to the left and they were good enough roofs in their way; but down at the bottom of this gentle grade lay the ideal roof.

It was red and tidy and it covered a trim little farmhouse that might have been taken from a water-color, with its prim picket fence out front and traces of the summer's old-fashioned garden at the side.

"There is our hotel!" Mr. Farnham announced.

"And there is a town—see the white steeple, Wilbur, miles and miles over that way?" Jane added.

"I wonder if that isn't Batesford?" the driver muttered, with keenest interest. "It was only twenty-eight miles from the last crossroads sign, back there in the timber. However—Batesford will be there an hour from now. We can dare think of food again, Jane. Look at that little home! Can't you see the inside of it now—plump, motherly woman, glorious dinner steaming on the old wood-burner—new cider, too, very likely. But remember: Jane *Fenwick!*"

First, Mr. Farnham felt instinctively, a big, shaggy, friendly dog would appear, wag his tail and bark the message of their coming to the family within. Next, two or three chubby children would come to light, standing shyly in the doorway, their innocent eyes round and wondering at the great car and the surpassingly lovely lady it had brought to their humble gate.

They would race away as the visitors advanced upon the house and then would come their mother, peerless and immaculate feeder of hungry people. It was a picture as pleasant as any he had visualized for a long time, and Mr. Farnham smiled from ear to ear as he assisted Jane from the car.

The dog, apparently, was absent that day; at any rate, he failed to put in an appearance as they started up the long, steep path to the house. And the children were somewhere else, too; or perhaps they had taken fright and were hiding behind their still invisible mother.

Filled with a vast complacency, Mr. Farnham led his lovely hostess to the narrow porch and rapped smartly on the glass-paneled door.

And in something less than one second the door opened with a swish and a puff of musty inner air floated out to them, while in the doorway a spare woman of sixty, hard-eyed and flat-chested, surveyed them angrily as she demanded:

"Heh! Ye *did* come back t'pay for 'em!"

"Madam—" Mr. Farnham began.

"I knew *you* wasn't decent enough to come back, but I thought mebbe the woman

might make ye," the lady went on swiftly. "You killed two black Cochins and a white Dorking, and them hens cost me—"

Her squinting gaze wandered to the car and rested there, growing distinctly disappointed after a minute.

"Oh! I thought you was the man that killed my chickens this morning," she said sourly. "What d'ye want?"

Her acid and unfriendly stare completed the picture of the hospitable country mother. But there are times when one does not take offense so easily as at other times.

"What we should like," said Mr. Farnham, with his most ingratiating smile, "is some breakfast. Our food gave out—we're touring, you know."

"Uhuh?" The lady's eye estimated Mr. Farnham's attire, and then that of his companion. "I dunno's I can give you much. I live here all alone and I don't overfeed like some. I might scrape up something if you wanter pay for it?"

"Scrape, madam, and bless you!" said Mr. Farnham, less happily. "We're too almighty hungry to be critical."

Rhapsodies were never inspired by ice-cold corn-bread, served with butter unblushingly warm and tired. No soul ever leaped to the empyrean ether at the sight of lean, tough ham, badly cooked on a kerosene stove whose personal vapors floated through the house like a pestilence and accompanied by pale, shrinking little eggs.

Nor do consumptive prunes or hard-boiled tea add greatly to the sum total of human bliss; but when all these things had been set before Jane Fayre and the lonely person who constituted her motoring party, when they had examined the lineoleum table-cloth and found it elderly but apparently sanitary, they did not protest.

Silently, busily, they went about the assimilation of nourishment, while the woman stood grimly at one side; and after a time it occurred to Mr. Farnham that she might be of a little more help.

"Is that town ahead Batesford?" he asked.

"That's Batesford."

"Are you acquainted there?"

"I've known everybody there pretty near since they were born."

"Ah?" pursued Mr. Farnham, and his smile grew more unconcerned. "Do you happen to know of any one there named Thompson—a man, a workman, possibly? Big fellow, I believe. I don't know whether he's a resident or not."

The woman shook her head promptly.

"No Thompson there," she said. "There ain't been a Thompson in Batesford for thirty years!"

"But I'm sure—" Mr. Farnham began.

"They ain't been a Thompson in Batesford for thirty years!" the lady snapped impatiently. "The last Thompson there was Lester, that owned the sawmill, and he died back in '85! Don't look at me like that, young man; I know what I'm talkin' about. Ain't my brother postmaster in Batesford this last eighteen years? Ain't I down there every afternoon o' my life, helping him when the heavy mail comes in?"

Her sharp eye challenged Mr. Farnham. He turned from it and caught the startled light in Jane's, but he made no comment. Silently, they finished breakfast—or luncheon or dinner, as they chose to regard it—and rose; and the lady came nearer and waited expectantly for Mr. Farnham's:

"That was—er—grateful, at any rate. How much do we owe you, madam?"

The purveyor of emergency meals drew one long breath.

"Dollar'n a half each!" said she. "Three dollars!"

"That, at least, is cheaper than starving to death, isn't it?" Mr. Farnham murmured as his hand slid into his pocket. "Do you accommodate many wayfarers?"

"None that don't ask 'emselves in," the kindly woman said, and the glance she shot at Mr. Farnham was no less than hateful.

Jane moved uneasily toward the door and Mr. Farnham's hand went deeper; and he looked at the elder woman and said quite apologetically: "I'm afraid that I may have to ask you to change a bill. There seems to be just one dime in the pocket where I keep the small money."

"How big's yer bill?"

"I've nothing smaller than a twenty," and Farnham's hand entered his inner coat-pocket.

"I can change it," said the lady, and folded her arms.

The hand, in fact, did more than enter. It paused and fumbled and then dived down deep. Twice it prodded—and then it came out swiftly and entered the inner pocket on the other side, while a sudden horrified line appeared between Mr. Farnham's brows.

Again the hand dived deep, again it fumbled and prodded; and with even greater

speed it came out and raced to Mr. Farnham's side-pocket, while the other hand did likewise.

The lady's ears appeared to twitch, like the ears of a horse warned of danger. The hands, working together very nicely by this time, flashed into view and flashed out of sight even again, this time exploring Mr. Farnham's trousers-pockets—and abruptly Mr. Farnham said:

"Well, upon my word! I remember now! I left my wallet home, locked up in my desk!"

"Wilbur!" cried Jane.

"Yes! I remember putting the small stuff in this pocket—seven or eight dollars in silver and single bills—and meaning to get the wallet the very last thing, and then the clock struck—well, all that doesn't help much now, does it?" Mr. Farnham asked with an apologetic smile. "I shall have to call on your purse for this three dollars, Jane."

And there the young man's smile faded out abruptly. There was nothing even faintly suggestive of three dollars in the blank gaze with which Jane was regarding him; her eyes were thunderstruck, her lips parted, as she said:

"Why, Wilbur! I haven't even one cent!"

CHAPTER XV.

LAW AND THE LAWLESS.

MANY are the unusual situations which baffle all concerned; this one baffled a mere two-thirds of the persons involved. While Jane and Wilbur Farnham stared at each other the elder lady's iron hand gripped the situation, as it were, and brought it under perfect, instant control.

"You can't play none o' that on me!" she said vigorously. "You come right up with that three dollars!"

"My—my dear lady—" Mr. Farnham began.

"You pay me that three dollars and no nonsense, or it'll be the worse for you!" the lady insisted, and emphasized each word by a rap on the table. "I ain't the fool I look by no means, and I tell you—"

"If you will just be patient one minute," Mr. Farnham said sweetly. "We are not trying to swindle you, dear lady. We—"

"You bet you ain't, and you ain't going to!" the "dear lady" assured him.

"The thing is an unfortunate accident, and nothing more, and when you pause to consider that we are several hundred miles from home without even the price of one gallon of gasoline, you will agree that we—and not you—are getting the worst of it. Jane," said Mr. Farnham, quite pathetically, "are you quite sure that—that—"

"I'm only too sure," Jane said. "I never carry any money when we're in the car—or very rarely. Aunt Hettie had Aunt Martha's bag with our cash in it—the brown one, you know, with—"

The lady of the house laughed harshly.

"You needn't t' bother with all that play-actin' on my account," she said incisively. "I've seen your kind before and dealt with 'em! You pay up!"

"That is exactly what we mean to do!" Mr. Farnham's temper was coming up briskly. "You may believe that we're here with just one dime or not, as you choose. That privilege belongs to you. And as to paying your three dollars, I'll either send it to you as soon as we have wired for funds, or—"

"Or there may be something on the car that we could leave for security?" Jane suggested anxiously.

"Yes, or that!" concluded Mr. Farnham.

"You ain't got anything hitched on that car that I want, and as for sending my three dollars along, I wouldn't trust you no further than I could see you, and mebbe not that far. I've seen beats before dressed up just as nice as you be, and—"

The flow of words stopped suddenly as the lady looked from the window of her pretty little home. Also did the emphatic shaking of her head cease, and a slow, astonished smile of genuine pleasure came to her lips.

She turned back to Mr. Farnham triumphantly.

"I guess you *will* pay now!" said she. "There's our Batesford constable down there in the road!"

It was annoying, of course, and altogether ridiculous, but a visible shock ran through Wilbur Farnham. He stepped to the doorway and frowned threateningly at the sunny world beyond, and Jane came close to his side and remained there.

If the person in the roadway was a constable there was something really disconcerting about his actions. He had arrived in a buckboard, and even when they saw him first his eye was upon Jane Fayre's car.

Now he slung the reins over the picket fence as he descended to earth, and, quite oblivious to the tragedy in the homestead, advanced upon the unoccupied automobile.

A broad-shouldered man and rather heavy of feature, at first sight one might have fancied him stolid and unemotional, yet it was plain almost immediately that he owned a high-pitched nervous organism.

With quick, jerky steps he approached Jane's car and stopped short. His head was thrust forward suddenly.

He stooped and stared hard at the license tags so neatly fashioned by Mr. Farnham. He felt of them, wiggling their flimsy cardboard structure, and, distant though he was, they could hear him growl as he stood erect and stared at the house.

The woman, having pushed past them, was on the narrow porch and shrilling:

"Thornton! You Thornton Hill! Come up here! I want you!"

Grimly the constable nodded and swung up the path, and the nearer he came the more he looked like a real officer of the law.

His chin was very square and his hands large and hairy, but one forgot them when one met his eye, which possessed that cold, steady, accusing stare used almost exclusively by paying tellers.

The eye studied Jane as its owner came to the steps, and found her lacking; it inspected Mr. Farnham with even less approval. It passed to the elder woman, and grew merely grave as the constable said:

"You want me about these people, Miss Turner?"

"That's just what I do want you about, Thornton!" the lady informed him readily. "They come in here and made me cook a meal, and they ain't willing to pay three dollars when—"

"You just leave this to me, Miss Turner," the constable said quietly. "You'll get your three dollars."

"I'd very much prefer dealing with you!" Mr. Farnham began warmly. "This—"

All the majesty of the sovereign people's law was in the hand that stayed him.

"That's enough. I'll do the talking, young feller," said the constable. "You'll get all the dealings with me you want, I take it."

"Well—"

"Didn't know Cook lived in Batesford, or you'd have taken another route, hey?" the law pursued, with an evil smile.

"Cook?" asked Jane.

"Turnips!" breathed Mr. Farnham. "No, I'd forgotten the man was alive. But—"

"That'll do; you don't have to say nothing that'll commit you," the constable chuckled most unpleasantly; and abruptly his eye abandoned all other concerns and attached itself to Mr. Farnham as a postage-stamp to its letter! *"What's your name, young feller?"*

"Fenwick!" exploded Mr. Farnham.

"This here lady?"

"My sister."

"Your car, I take it?"

"Of course."

"Belongs to you, does it?"

"Naturally," said Mr. Farnham. "We—"

"Umum!" browsed the sheriff and caressed his square chin. "Them are your license numbers, are they?"

"Yes."

"G 1200?"

"Certainly!" admitted the brazen young man.

"Don't use regular metal tags, do you? Just pasteboard ones?"

For a brain so long accustomed to honest thought, Mr. Farnham's was adapting itself very nicely; already he had the outline of a story that would account perfectly for the strips of pasteboard!

"As to those," he began, with a bland smile, "they happen to be there be—"

"Because you stole that car!" the constable thundered suddenly.

"What?" gasped the criminal thinker.

"You stole it," Mr. Hill said triumphantly. "I dunno yet who you stole it from or where it belongs, but—"

"You're crazy!" Mr. Farnham said angrily.

"Am I?" laughed the arm of the law. "Mebbe so, but I'm not a plain, ordinary, blasted fool, anyway! When I take to thinking up numbers for stolen cars, I'll get out the book and pick some that ain't in use. *That G 1200 is my own license number!"*

He leaned gracefully on the porch railing, permitting his large revolver to form the keynote of his pose, as it protruded from his pocket!

Had he meant this as a subduing hint, it was wasted effort. Temporarily, the news that he had picked the one worst possible number out of several hundred thousand had quite subdued Mr. Farnham.

He turned limp; he blinked incredulously at the constable, who rewarded him with a weary and significant smile; he turned a flitting and bewildered glance toward Jane.

To any eye—and how much more to the searing, relentless eye of the law! Mr. Farnham was the criminal unmasked. Nor had the one brief glance showed him any really brazen assurance in Jane's quarter.

That charming young woman was rather pale, just now, and her eyes were very round indeed; one hand clutched tightly the smallest of handkerchiefs, until the knuckles showed beautifully white; the other hand picked at the button on the pocket of Jane's motor-coat, and picked and picked again.

"Yes, I gotta little runabout," the constable was saying pleasantly, "and if she hadn't gone and busted yesterday, I'd 'a' had you a good deal earlier t'-day."

"This car—our car—" Mr. Farnham began bravely, staggering out of his corner.

The constable ignored him; he was addressing the elder lady now.

"Joe Cook come walkin' into town this morning, long about dawn, an' got me out o' bed," he explained. "Seems he was haulin' his half of the turnips from the farm his brother works for him, and this swell crook run him down. He done Joe *a thousand dollars'* worth of damage and—"

Normal cerebration returned at last to Wilbur Farnham. Jane apart, there was nothing to be gained by growing angry at a somewhat wooden-headed officer. He smiled.

"Constable," he interrupted gently, "I haven't done anybody a thousand dollars' worth of damage, and what your friend Cook suffered we're more than willing to pay. And I am not, as you assume, a 'swell crook' and that car isn't stolen.

"As for the numbers, that's really up to the chauffeur who left us yesterday. Our numbers were—er—lost and he made others, you see. If he has made a mistake—"

"Regular chauffeur of yours?"

"Of course, and—"

"Washed the car every day and shined her and so on, did he?"

"Why, he wasn't our regular chauffeur—no!" Jane put in helpfully. "He was a new man; we had only had him for a day."

The constable smiled cynical amusement at Jane.

"Yes, that sounds better," he drawled. "Did seem kinder funny that a feller could take care of a car and look at the same number every day for nine months without even knowing what the number was, didn't it?"

"Well—you see—" Jane stammered.

"But I guess it wasn't bright enough to get over and you needn't bother thinking up any more of the same kind," the officer said, stretching comfortably. "You're some younger than this other party and you ain't got his experience."

"Look here, you," Mr. Farnham rumbled threateningly. "Don't—"

The constable's thick, hard forefinger pointed suddenly at him!

"As for you, young feller," he said sternly, "you better not talk! You don't fool me none, either of you. This is the backwoods and I've lived here ever since I was born, but you ain't the first swell-dressed crooks that's hit this section, by a long shot! You made a bad guess when you brought that car this way, wherever you stole it, and you made a darned sight worse one when you picked my numbers."

"Constable!" thundered Wilbur Farnham.

"And as for that three dollars—d'ye want to pay it now? That'll be one less charge against you, anyway."

"I have just one dime!" the large young man confessed.

"Want to pay or don't you?" the law asked wearily.

"I tell you I can't! We asked her—"

The constable closed the matter by turning away and beckoning them.

"Come on!" said he.

"Where?" Jane asked.

"Jail!" said the law.

"Wilbur!" gasped his alleged sister.

"Well—we're not there yet, Jane," the young man said dizzily. "We—"

"Oh, you don't need to get excited," the constable chuckled. "We got a nice new jail over there t' Batesford. Brand new and you two'll be the first to use it, except for one drunk. Yessir! Built by one of the fellers that designs the inside o' these here big States' prisons, so you'll be right up to date. Come on! March!"

"I—I don't want to go to jail!" Jane quavered wildly.

"Most likely not, but you'd oughter thought about that sooner," the constable said, not unkindly. "You look's if you might have come of pretty decent folks. G'long there, now! You two start ahead

and don't try no monkey shines, because I'll be right back of you with the gun."

Stunned, they gazed at each other for a moment. And then the moment had passed and Mr. Farnham's eye roved the landscape, and in the eye flickered a most unusually keen flicker of intelligence!

"Come, Jane," he said gently. "Before I'm quite through with this lout, I'll run him so far out of the country that he'll never find his way back. But just now appearances are against us and we'll have to go."

Smiling, he led the way down the path, vouchsafing never a glance at their late hostess or her ally, and as the arm of the law followed close behind it was plain that he found the smile rather puzzling. Calmer grew this wholly unwarranted expression and more genuinely amused, as Mr. Farnham paused beside the big car and adjusted spark and throttle for the start.

But there was no trace of amusement upon Jane's lovely countenance. All too plainly, she was gazing into the immediate future.

They would land in jail. That in itself was absolutely incredible, but it was not the worst. They would be held, of course, and before they could even hope for legal aid they would have to communicate with their base of supplies at home!

And it was hard to believe that when either of their true names had been written upon a telegram blank or spoken over a telephone the constable would hold the secret inviolate! And if he did not—

She choked and looked appealingly at Mr. Farnham, whose fixed smile was all but absent-minded! Across the road Mr. Farnham's eyes were roaming, along the stone wall and beyond it to the wide meadow.

There were features of that meadow which missed Jane altogether, but held a peculiar appeal for Wilbur Farnham. One of them was the steep grade downward, beginning at the very bottom of the stone wall; from this side of the road a chasm seemed to yawn beyond that wall, although fifty yards farther one saw the meadow sloping at last to the level.

"Constable!" said Mr. Farnham.

"What?"

"You don't want to think better of this affair, before you go any further with it, do you?"

"I don't have to," the law said grimly. "Start your wagon, mister. I'll leave my horse here and ride in the back."

The large young man shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please," said he, "but—and I'm telling you this for your own sake as much as ours—you're preparing a terrible mess for yourself. We're not criminals and this car is not stolen; it's our property. What happened to your friend Cook will be settled to his satisfaction about one hour after I reach a telegraph office, and what happened to these numbers is, candidly, none of your business!"

"Driving a car with false numbers—"

"I know, and that will all be explained at the proper time, too," Mr. Farnham pursued coldly. "How our man happened to pick your numbers is beyond me, unless he's one of your personal friends and acquainted with your car. He's a crook, possibly; his name is Cragg."

His haughty, frigid eye surveyed the constable; his lips curled in a smile that was now pure contempt! And Mr. Farnham was a large young man, aristocratic of feature and bearing; and for half a minute the constable shifted and grew doubtful before the withering smile.

But abruptly his own ugly smile returned.

"I don't know no Cragg," said he. "You can tell the other things to the judge, young feller, and see what he thinks about them. I know they're lies, but he might feel different about it. Start your engine."

With a visible and very commendable effort Mr. Farnham restrained his temper.

"That's final, is it?" he asked.

"You betcher!" responded the constable.

Mr. Farnham opened the foredoor and motioned Jane into her seat, turning his back on the constable with a brief:

"Attend to your horse, then; I'll wait for you. Be careful about stepping on things on the floor when you get into the car."

He threw in the starter and the motor whirred again, but this time presumably for the saddest lap of its remarkable journey—and with a shrug the constable turned toward his patient nag, cropping grass beside the picket fence.

All men make mistakes, but few make greater than did this Thornton Hill when he permitted his mind to wander from Wilbur Farnham to a horse. Because then the constable's back was squarely toward

Mr. Farnham and the sun was shining upon the constable's front elevation, precluding warning shadows.

Thornton Hill reached for the reins. Mr. Farnham, whisking about with the soundless speed of a lightning flash, reached for Thornton Hill. Both powerful hands had settled upon the constable's anatomy even before Jane realized that their owner was no longer beside the car, and one of them gathered the constable's collar while the other snatched out his pistol and sent it hurtling down the road!

A hoarse and horrid shout emerged from the throat of Thornton Hill and he sought to whirl about and come to grips with Wilbur Farnham.

It was quite useless. Mr. Farnham, just then, held a monopoly on local grips, for he had anchored another on the small of Thornton Hill's back and lifted that person bodily from the earth.

And now, with a bound, he had crossed the road and lifted Thornton Hill high in air! And now he was swinging Thornton Hill and now he had hurled him straight across the stone wall and—even before the thud Mr. Farnham was in the car and backing about, while Jane caught at the sides and the kindly lady on the porch screamed piercingly and incessantly!

Straight up hill, and away from Batesford, roared the big six!

CHAPTER XVI.

OUTLAWED!

UNDER pressure, one does many queer things.

Ordinarily, in the fulness of his new knowledge of motoring, Mr. Farnham would have attacked this hill cautiously, dropping into second speed and climbing comfortably; just now, having started on his high gear, he opened everything in sight and climbed on just the same, splitting the country silence with the thunder of his open cutout, sending pounds of fine dirt into the air!

Faithful as ever, the car responded nobly, but toward the top of the ridge it labored hard and as the speed lessened Mr. Farnham turned for one backward glance.

"You—you killed him!" Jane gasped.

"Did I? Look!" her motoring party cried jubilantly.

Gloriously distant at the bottom of the steep meadow, Thornton Hill had rolled his fill. Now he was scrambling frantically and pawing earth; and now he had attained his foothold and stood erect, mouth open and shouting, arms waving expressively, alive to a fault!

And the active, elderly lady who had so endeared herself was in the roadway, too, moving directly toward the constable's pistol and likely to clutch it in another ten seconds.

Mr. Farnham pressed his invaluable accelerator pedal and the car whizzed from their angered sight.

But it was by no means the same innocent automobile that had gone downhill an hour ago. Then it had been troubled only by strained conventions, memories of minor past misfortunes and the possibility of a little trouble ahead with one Thompson.

Now, very differently, the car was beyond the law, as were its occupants also—and the certainty of this knowledge did nothing to bring bright smiles to Jane Fayre's lips or merry jests to those of Wilbur Farnham. It was cheering, of course, to know that he had fallen short of actual murder, but the certainty was not sufficiently stimulating to balance all the rest.

Driver and owner, each felt keenly that Mr. Farnham's optimism of the early day had been mistaken. Events were combining to prove this conclusively; even the sky above was doing its little share now.

Another quarter-hour and the sun would vanish, for black clouds were piling swiftly to the north of them, and unless the wind changed or the whim of the weather, they were due shortly for a real mountain thunderstorm.

Silently, then, they sped on, back toward the dreary woodland, back even toward the friendly clearing; but Mr. Farnham, evidently, had no mind to return to the latter spot. At the crossroads he slowed down a little, studied the jumbled and many-armed sign-post, nodded grimly and wheeled sharply to the north.

Jane, too staggered by the immediate past to give great thought to the immediate future, drew her coat tightly about the slender throat and did not even ask his idea in seeking strange country.

Uphill they went again and downhill, with the speed gage dropping rarely below the 40 that had lately come to be its favorite minimum. Past a tiny, forsaken farm

here and there and then through another endless stretch of forest they rolled—beside a vast marshy tract that lay dismally below hills recently burned over, standing bare and forbidding now with a few lean, blackened poles that had been live trees and many green huckleberry bushes—through more woods and further woods, but at least away from Batesford and the outraged law.

The high road swept widely to the west again, after a long time, and Mr. Farnham grunted his satisfaction; and having grunted satisfaction, he was forced to pause. That last flare of lightning had ended the career of at least one of the trees he was beginning to hate, and as the ground shook with the thunder the first big drops came down.

"We'll pull in at the side, I think, Jane," he said. "I don't know whether cars are hit more readily on the open road or under the trees, but we can't get up the side curtains now without getting drowned in the process."

Under protecting boughs, the six came to a standstill and Mr. Farnham spent several seconds listening keenly, when he had drawn up the top of the car. Only the roar of the wind and the spatter of raindrops came to him and he smiled at Jane.

"Lucky!" he said contentedly.

"What is?" Jane asked wonderingly.

"The rain!"

"Because it will drown the man's horse if he is still galloping after us?" Mr. Farnham's hostess asked forlornly.

"No, my child," said the large young man, with the tenderest of grins, "because the horse isn't galloping, for one thing, and because, even if Mr. Hill—was that his beastly name?—has connected with a car, this rain is going to wash the track of our fancy tread out of the road."

Jane sighed heavily.

"They'll know where we've come, Wilbur," said she. "They'll know!"

"I doubt that," Mr. Farnham replied thoughtfully. "Coming up here, wherever we are, there were just sixteen other roads we might as well have taken. I counted them, and when this shower is over, all of them will look alike to Hill, or anybody else. And we haven't passed anybody in all this infernal desolate stretch, either, so there'll be no one to give them a clue."

With nice judgment, and as if to belie his optimism, the storm howled dismally and sent a Niagara of water hammering on the top of the car. Jane shuddered.

"Don't look so downcast," advised her companion. "We're in something of a hole now, of course, but—"

"Hole!" echoed the girl's horror-stricken voice. "It's an abyss, Wilbur! That man—he'll never rest until he finds us!"

"The gentleman I tossed over the fence?"

"Yes!" said Jane. "And when he does catch us, he'll put us *in jail!*"

Mr. Farnham merely smiled.

"He'll have to catch us first, Jane. Would it have been better to submit quietly to arrest?"

"No!"

"Then I think it was better to throw him over the fence. Oh, I'm not trying to belittle the thing, but that spectacular stunt was the only possible course and I was mighty lucky to get away with it. If we had submitted, we'd have been locked up before this, with the entire population, doubtless, filing past to look at the two captures.

"And then there are telephones and telegraphs these days, you know. We should have had to tell some kind of logical story, and that name of Fenwick would have been spotted first—when they came to look up a car of whatever other number I might have remembered."

"Don't!"

"All right, dear, but I made no mistake when I threw him over the fence. That isn't what hit me hardest, by any means, escaping jail!"

"What did, Wilbur?" Jane asked wonderingly.

Amazement shone in Mr. Farnham's eye.

"Thompson!" he cried.

"What the woman said about him?"

"What she didn't say!" corrected the large young man. "The man has disappeared completely."

"He can't have disappeared if he was never there."

"And he must have been there, or he couldn't have married you there," Mr. Farnham hurried on, not very coherently. "If he isn't in Batesford, where under the sun is he? And if he was never there, why did the man Boggs say he was still there?"

"The woman herself may have been mistaken," Jane suggested.

"She wasn't the sort of lady that makes mistakes—and she could have had no motive in the world for telling anything but the truth just then. Thompson's gone; he was never anything but a burglar and no-

body in town ever knew that he was there, except you and the people who were present at the ceremony!"

"Then—"

"Then where is he? Yes!" Farnham cried, in swiftly rising agitation. "How are we to get track of him and serve him with that complaint before to-morrow night? And if I don't manage that it's ten to one you'll lose your fortune and—why, good Lord, Jane! Jail or assault and battery or anything else amounts to nothing beside the loss of your inheritance!"

His hostess refused to rise with him to any emotional heights. Strength and sane thought were coming back to Jane once more and she smiled slightly at the flushed face beside her.

"It isn't gone yet, Wilbur," she said quietly. "It seems to me that our most immediate danger is of being caught."

Some little time Mr. Farnham frowned thoughtfully at her.

"You're right, Jane," he concluded. "And it isn't the thing of actually being caught that matters—I could get in touch with somebody and have cash wired in to pay our way out with a fine, if we could do it in a rush and keep our identity secret and all that sort of thing. But it's the risk of having our true names come out and of losing all the valuable time and so on! . . . We may have to take some long chances to avoid that."

Jane's smile quite astonished him. There was a certain daring quality in that smile which hinted that Jane would not shrink.

"I am willing," she said. "We've so much at stake now, with all that will happen to us if we don't find Thompson and then get away safely, that chances will have to be pretty long to matter much. I'm in the game to the finish, Wilbur!"

"And you look good for it, too!" that young man cried admiringly. "Wait a while; let me think, dear!"

He frowned and fell silent again, while the rain pounded on and on, lightning flashing, thunder crashing, wind howling. Once or twice he nodded assent to his unspoken conclusions; finally, Mr. Farnham seemed rather startled at his own thoughts.

He took to whistling softly; he was whistling still as the shower passed finally and a little patch of blue showed in the sky.

But he ceased whistling suddenly when he had stepped down, opened the gas-tank and estimated its present total contents. Eyebrows elevated, Mr. Farnham looked at Jane.

"Well, if I was in any doubt before, this gasoline settles it," said he.

"Settles what, Wilbur?"

"The several intricate criminal paths of thought I was trying to follow. I'll break them to you gently, as we come to the different stages, I think—but this settles the matter of route. I spent some time this morning studying the road maps of this section and I've got a pretty clear idea how much gas this car uses. I may be wrong, but, guessing at our present location, I should think we may get into Batesford without two quarts to spare."

"And get out again?"

"I'll have to study out the source of a new supply before we reach the bottom," Mr. Farnham said desperately. "The first thing is to get near Batesford again, and we can do that by keeping straight ahead for another ten or fifteen miles and then turning southwest, I'm pretty sure.

"They're not chasing us—that's one thing; or if they are they've taken the wrong direction. So Batesford is really the last place they'll expect us to turn up, and if we appear with suffcient suddenness—yep! That's the only thing to do," concluded Mr. Farnham. "We've wasted too much time here already."

Jane nodded.

"It's nearly five."

"Then it will be long after dark when we make the Batesford neighborhood again, and that is just so much the better for the—er—things I have in mind. One more detail, and we'll start."

Briskly Farnham tore loose the cardboard license pads that had been so unhappily chosen and ripped them into little bits, carrying the pieces into the bushes and throwing them far from him.

"You're going to put on the old numbers?" Jane asked fearfully.

"And run into an alarm telephoned ahead—the description of the car and of us—and have them trace this car straight down to *you?* Hardly!" laughed Mr. Farnham. "I'm going to make some new numbers, Jane. Let me see if there's more of that pasteboard where this came from."

He hunted busily for many minutes, turning over everything that lay beneath the front and back seats.

"There isn't another piece as big as a visiting card!" he reported.

"We'll have to drive without numbers."

"And that's all well enough for the woods, but as soon as we pass a village or a house we'll attract attention, and if they have a description of the car and see one answering that description coming without—well, we'll have to *get* numbers!" Farnham muttered grimly, as he took his place behind the wheel and sent the car rolling into the rain-soaked road.

"How, Wilbur?" his hostess asked, with some reason.

"I don't know, Jane, but I'll get them if I have to murder a sign-painter and use his stock! I'll see this thing through now successfully, with all its ramifications, if I fetch up on a stone slab in one of their hayseed morgues!"

The civilized young man of day before yesterday had altogether vanished. In his place sat the newer Mr. Farnham, cold-eyed and elemental, with a set, determined chin which needed shaving now and would look like a caveman's two days hence if circumstances kept him and his razor apart.

Not that he had suffered at all by the change, Jane thought as she watched him; sheer force oozed from him now as he gripped the wheel and guided the car steadily along, mixing much previously absorbed theory with his gasoline, to the economy of the latter.

Night was coming on again with some speed, their third night on tour. Twice they had camped, but they would not camp this night; hitherto there had been a price upon their several nervous systems, but now there was a price upon their persons, their car, their reputations and everything else!

Nor was the law Jane's only fear just now. Aunt Hettie, happy in the possession of the little brown hand-bag with the money, had certainly used the long distance and talked everything over with Uncle Horace Porter-Preston long before this—and both Uncle Horace and Aunt Martha were sticklers upon the utmost propriety. It was not unthinkable that Uncle Horace with a posse of his own had abandoned business even again and come in pursuit of her, and if he ever caught up, all the estates in America would not count as against her own instant return.

And so it came back to the old proposition; if Wilbur went ahead—

"I guess *that's* the end of the woods!" Mr. Farnham ejaculated. "There's a light ahead, Jane."

"A farm?"

"Looks like it; we've passed several cultivated stretches in the last two miles and it all seems to be open country now. I think we'll coast down here, too, Jane; it saves gas and it makes less noise. It's just possible, you know, that somebody may be waiting for us with a shotgun, and if they don't hear us coming we'll have that much start on the shot!"

There was nothing to justify the cheerful prediction as they came silently to the bottom of the grade.

The farmhouse was there, to be sure, but nothing more peaceful could have been imagined. Nestling far in from the road, several of its windows gave out the soft yellow light of oil lamps; on this side the dining-room showed clearly, with four young children and a bearded man seated about the table, while a buxom woman hurried back and forth from the kitchen, and laughter floated musically through the thick dusk.

It was, in fine, the very farm which Mr. Farnham had visualized in vain, that morning; but it failed to hold his attention now for more than a moment. After one glance, his keen eye left the pretty picture and peered into the roadside barn; he leaned from the side of the car, as he stopped it suddenly without a creak, and peered more intently.

Then Mr. Farnham bent close to Jane and purred:

"Don't speak, dear! Don't make a sound. I'll be back in half a minute; where's that little wrench?"

He found it after a noiseless hunt and was on the ground before Jane thought to disobey and ask his mission.

He paused and peered again at the house, where the happy family remained all unconscious of the refugee element in their road. Chuckling, Mr. Farnham vanished abruptly into the dark mouth of the barn.

Minutes dragged by. Out of the gloom one or two faint squeaks issued at long intervals, and several times the gentle rasp of metal upon metal, until Jane grew restless and took to peering on her own account.

As if her anxious gaze had summoned him, Mr. Farnham appeared suddenly. There was something under his arm; he laid the something quickly on the back seat and bounded into his place behind the

wheel; and quite as if it were the most natural and legitimate thing in the world to have done, he said happily as he started the motor:

"I got 'em, Jane!"

"Got what?"

"Their license tags!" said Mr. Farnham. "I stole them!"

CHAPTER XVII.

PLANNING A BURGLARY.

MISS JANE FAYRE'S six, now beyond all laws of man, paused after several miles of very swift going. Its driver considered the locality, which was quite as lonely and cheerless as other localities in which the car had passed recently; a deep gorge lay to the left and a hill of scraggly growth to the right—but it seemed to satisfy Mr. Farnham, for he pulled into the blacker shadows at the side and stopped short.

"Wilbur," Jane said, "it is a crime to steal license tags!"

Her companion chuckled without any remorse.

"It's a worse one to use them, my dear, but those things don't count with a man who tries to kill constables. I don't know that a little two-cent crime like this isn't almost beneath me now, Jane."

"But—"

"It was too bad to have to do it, of course, but Providence left that car for us to loot. I'll pay for their tags a little later, you know, and square the whole thing; but just now we need those numbers more than their rightful owner does."

"And when they catch us?"

"This will hardly figure among the other things they'll have against us, Jane," sighed Mr. Farnham. "There was a certain beauty about those tags that was irresistible from the very second I spotted them, there in the dark. For one thing, they're nothing like that infernal G 1200, so we're safe enough on the number question until the happy farmer gentleman discovers what happened and starts *his* little alarm over the telephone wires. And I don't believe that will happen before morning, either," the budding criminal declared as he stepped down.

"Why?"

"Because they looked like home-keeping, respectable people, and they'll hardly be joy-riding around the wilds after dark. . . . Wait till I get these things fastened on, Jane, and I'll break the real horror to you!"

Flashlight in one hand, wrench in the other, Mr. Farnham switched off the headlights and went humming to the front of the car, worked there for a time and passed, humming still, to the other end; while Jane stared into the inky night and tried her best to feel that no string of swift, avenging automobiles was coming up behind, laden down with armed men.

It was a sufficiently strange train of thought for a young woman who had stepped out of Newport's ultra-civilization only four or five days ago, but she found nothing very grotesque in its pursuit.

Jane, indeed, had reached the stage of being quite game and quite resigned; they had come to the point, as Farnham truly said, of taking very long chances and there was no turning back now. If they won, all was well. If they did not—Jane refused to think longer upon that possibility.

"Well, that's done!" said Mr. Farnham's matter-of-fact tone, as he returned to her side. "Does this particular spot oppress you, Jane?"

"No."

"Mind staying here for five or six hours?"

"Not if—if it is safe to stop and stopping will do us any good, Wilbur," said Jane. "But why—"

"Because it is necessary, if we're ever to get away with this thing," the other went on. "Everything has gone wrong so far, and I am almost ready to believe that it's because we have tried to handle an extraordinary situation by ordinary methods."

"I don't know what you mean."

Mr. Farnham sighed and laughed softly.

"You will know, presently," he said. "Jane, dear, tell me all about this justice's house in Batesford—the place where you were married. Is it in the center of the town, where lots of people are moving around?"

"No, it's away out on the north side of Batesford."

"Fairly isolated?"

"It's half a block to the next house."

"Well, that sounds rather promising, at least," murmured Mr. Farnham. "People go to bed pretty early up that way, don't they?"

"The place is like a graveyard after ten o'clock," said Jane.

"And now about the justice himself—Codd, was his name?"

"Yes."

"And his office, Jane," pursued the cross-examiner. "What part of the house does that occupy?"

"Why—it's an extension, I think. It runs out from the back of the building proper and has a side porch, with an entrance and a little sign—'Justice of the Peace,' or something like that."

"It has a safe?"

"A big, old safe—yes."

"And the man is justice and coroner and license clerk and everything else, in that neighborhood?"

"I've heard them joke about that."

"Now, when this nightmare ceremony had been performed, he set down the record of it, I presume? In a book, Jane—or what?"

"In a great big book. We—we signed something in the book, I think, and he put it back in the safe."

"That settles it!" chuckled Mr. Farnham, and his tone indicated that the examination was at an end. "That's probably the only existing written record of the crime, beside your certificate. Jane, dear, I don't want to startle you, but I'm going to turn burglar!"

"You're not going to try—" Jane began quickly.

"Listen to me, my child!" commanded Mr. Farnham. "Thompson is gone—that much we are bound to assume. We're pursued, so that even if he was there and waiting for us, we should have to hand him his complaint in about three seconds and then flee again. We might as well look the thing in the eye and admit that Thompson cannot be served for—oh, weeks, perhaps, if ever. That's item one settled!"

"I suppose it is true," Jane sighed.

"Passing, then, to item two," Mr. Farnham went on steadily. "I don't know much about law, Jane, and very likely if any one of the half-dozen legal friends I cherish were here, he'd say that I was insane and begin to explain it in Latin; but it seems to me that, along about next Wednesday, it will be up to somebody to *prove* that you're married. And little as I do know about law, I know that the unquestionable written records of a thing have a lot more weight in court than anybody's mere say-so!"

"Then—"

"Nobody will ever produce the records of this marriage, Jane," the large young man said calmly. "I'm going to steal and burn them!"

"I—I will not permit it!" Jane said weakly.

"Oh, yes, you will, my dear!" the stern voice assured her. "To my possibly distorted vision, that's the only possible chance out of a terrible mess in which you were absolutely blameless; and while the stunt may have a few unusual aspects, I honestly believe that I am justified in going to any length short of murder to save your patrimony."

"But if you should be caught?"

"I shall not be caught, Jane," the desperate one said placidly. "And now, by way of beginning the good work, we'll reduce that accursed marriage certificate to bits about one one-millionth of an inch square!"

"Did you keep it?"

"I tucked it away most carefully, Jane—in here among several quite important letters." Mr. Farnham began exploring his inner pocket and produced a dozen envelopes bound together with a rubber band. "It is between the pink one and the one from my bank and—no, I guess it's somewhere else, after all."

He stooped and held the package in the light of the little lamp on the dash, slipping off the band since the certificate seemed to have strayed from beside the pink envelope.

Cautiously, Mr. Farnham turned his envelopes over, one by one; the certificate did not appear. Muttering and frowning, he set about exploring the envelopes themselves. Letters came out and stray papers; he flattened them and shook them.

And when, for the second time, he had worked from end to end of the package, Mr. Farnham said blankly:

"It's gone, Jane! As surely as I'm breathing, the thing has disappeared again!"

"You've put it somewhere else."

"I haven't. I don't do that sort of thing. I stuck it between these two envelopes and they haven't been out of my pocket since—and this coat hasn't been off my back, either, except in the clearing. The infernal thing's bewitched!" cried Mr. Farnham. "It went back into the thin air it came from, and—Jane!"

"Yes?"

"Hapworthy couldn't possibly have

picked my pocket for spite? No, that's nonsense, I suppose. But somebody who had access to this coat wanted that certificate and—it must have been Cragg!"

"Wilbur, why should Cragg—" Jane began quite soothingly.

"I give it up! Why did he do all the other things? Why did he strain every nerve to escape and finally do it? Why did he turn white whenever you looked at him, Jane? I don't know and you don't know, but I'll make one guess: your university got track of that marriage and sent him to—"

Jane's sudden peal of laughter found an echo from Mr. Farnham's direction after a second or two.

"I admit it," he said. "That's foolish. But the thing is gone, Jane!"

"Then since you have lost one part of the record and can't destroy it," Jane suggested sanely, "why risk so much to—"

Violently Mr. Farnham's hand clutched her own.

"Jane!" he said hotly. "I may not have many good points, but once I've tackled a thing I never drop it until one or the other of us is *licked!* I'll find and destroy that fiendish trick certificate later if I have to devote my life to the job! And before this night is out I'll burn up the really important official record of your nightmare wedding if I have to burn Batesford with it!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

THE clock on the village hall had just struck one when the car without lights came to a soundless standstill on the outskirts of Batesford. Lingeringly the stroke died out and only the Sahara could have been more overwhelmingly silent than Batesford and her environs.

An economical village administration limited its street lighting to the main avenue, which constituted most of Batesford, and out this way the road was blacker than any tomb—so black indeed that Mr. Farnham's voice was dubious as he asked:

"I've never been here, you know. Have you any clear idea of where we are, Jane?"

"I know exactly where we are," the charming young person astonished him by saying. "That house across the road is where Edith Barr used to buy her eggs."

"And the justice's place?"

"It's about three hundred feet up that way, on the main street. But—Wilbur?"

"Yes, my darling?"

"I don't want you to do it!" Jane said flatly. "I appreciate it—all the risk you're willing to take for my sake, but it isn't worth—"

"We'll talk about that when we get out of Batesford again," Mr. Farnham interrupted. "Is there a street behind the justice's house?"

Jane sighed resignedly.

"I think that is it, Wilbur—just ahead there, where you see the crossroad and the oil-lamp on a post."

The car moved on, to the turn and around it, with Mr. Farnham whistling softly through his teeth, and the blackness before them grew more intense.

Mere inky shades, outlining themselves against perfectly impenetrable gloom, indicated a house here and there; they had passed the last one by full two hundred feet before Jane's hand, resting lightly on Mr. Farnham's arm, halted him.

"That—that's it!" Jane said faintly. "Through there, where you see the light on the main road!"

"The old house? Good enough. We're beside his barn now, evidently."

"I don't remember a barn."

"They've built it since you were here," chuckled Mr. Farnham. "We're so close to it that I can touch it with my hand. Now, Jane!"

"Yes?"

"You're not to move!" the budding burglar whispered. "You're to sit perfectly still here and not make one sound. Understand?"

"I hear, Wilbur," Jane said oddly.

"I've got a jimmy and the big screwdriver and a wrench heavy enough to twist the house from its foundations, and what one of them won't open the other will. Did I take the flashlight? Yes. That's all, then.

"Leave the door of the car wide open, because when I come back it may be with a rush. And don't be frightened, little girl," said Mr. Farnham, squeezing her hand. "It may be ten minutes before I'm back, but it will not be much longer than that."

A large, dusky, predatory figure, he was visible for a moment as he moved away toward Justice Codd's homestead; then the night swallowed Mr. Farnham, tools, mission and all.

What impressed him as most curious was

that he felt not the slightest nervousness as he tiptoed over the dry turf. Infrequently he had speculated upon the possible thoughts and sensations of the burglar while earning his nightly bread; brought down to the fact in his own person, they seemed to amount to nothing at all!

There was a certain thrill, to be sure, but that was perfect happiness. Jane Fayre loved him! For her sweet sake he was about to enter the home of the local records and loot the records themselves; he would as cheerfully have faced barehanded a sheriff's posse, thrashing each unit of the same to a finish and walking off with their horses, did Jane Fayre desire them.

Let it be borne in mind, too, that within the very week Wilbur Farnham had been a perfectly sane, almost a model, young man, holding a post in which, beside expert knowledge, unimpeachable honesty and moral character had been the largest requirements.

The protecting demons of dark crime seemed to be guiding his steps. Unerringly as if he had trod it since boyhood, he found the path that lay beside the justice's black and silent chicken coop and down toward his equally black and silent home. Unerringly and without once flashing his light, Mr. Farnham's fingers went out and gripped the first post of the porch.

That faintly shining surface was the glass panel of the justice's office door, he noted. He tried the knob and found it locked securely—which, on the whole, was not remarkable.

He slipped his jimmy in beside the lock and pried cautiously; and at once it became plain that throwing all his great strength into the task was needless. Even as he started to pry, splinters crackled softly and the door itself moved free of the lock's nosing. With just the faintest creak, it swung open before him—and there Mr. Farnham all but screamed, for a hand touched his arm lightly and then Jane's voice:

"In the far corner—over there, Wilbur!"

"What on earth—" breathed the burglar.

"Hush! Of course I came," said Jane quietly. "Did you think that I'd permit you to take all the risk alone?"

"Jane, dear! Will you *please* go back to the car?" Mr. Farnham pleaded wildly.

"No, Wilbur, because you haven't an idea where the safe is and there are chairs everywhere and you might fall over them or some of the other furniture and be caught."

"Sweetheart!" the burglar whispered frantically. "You—you don't understand what it would mean if we were both caught. You go back, dear, and stay in the car, and if you hear any excitement here, run! You have rings and if you can keep out of sight, somebody will lend you—"

The gentle hand slipped under his arm.

"Wilbur," spoke the gentle voice, "don't you think, if we're going to burglarize this house to-night, we'd better get about it?"

From Mr. Farnham's lips escaped a long and shaky breath. He tried to look at Jane and could not discern a feature; but she was most indisputably there and she meant to remain there!

"I'm sorry you did it, dear," he said. "I wish you wouldn't come in with me."

Lantern flicking little circles of light which vanished almost as they appeared, he stepped over the threshold and into the close air of the office—and still Jane was at his side.

"Over this way—in this corner, Wilbur," she breathed.

Mr. Farnham followed the guiding hand, and then stopped suddenly.

There, to be sure, was the safe, clear in the circle of light and looking exactly like an illustration in a burglar story. It was old and rusty with a single, simple dial; and while it might serve its purpose well enough, Fate chanced to have given Mr. Farnham a year of experience in a safe foundry and he felt that he could see the details of that lock through the steel!

Light in hand, he squatted before it, smiling. That particular lock was better than he had dared hope for, and when he had given a few tentative twirls—

"Wilbur!" Jane Fayre hissed into his ear.

"Eh?"

"There's somebody out there on the porch!"

"I—by gad! *There's somebody coming down stairs, too!*" Mr. Farnham gasped under his breath, as he bounded to his feet.

A dreadful instant, he looked about wildly in the gloom. And then he knew that it was far too late for flight!

At one side a doorway opened and a shadowy lady appeared, held a lamp high above her head and screamed chokingly!

At the other side, which was the porch, and as if released by the same spring, a mighty pocket flashlight flared out upon

them—a pistol was pointing steadily in their direction—and in the faint light of the lamp familiar features appeared behind the pistol.

"Well, that's the time," said Thornton Hill, constable, with sound reason, "I gotcher both!"

CHAPTER XIX.

BEHIND THE BARS.

AT their former meeting the constable had been clothed in army shirt of olive brown, with pleats and pockets and all the rest, which gave him a rather formidable look. He was not so garbed at present.

The collar of the nightgown which had been tucked hastily into the familiar trousers had been tastefully embroidered in red by some loving hand, as were the cuffs also; and the wild hair and the carpet slippers gave him a really comic appearance.

Yet neither Wilbur Farnham nor the adorable young woman who leaned so weakly against him burst into merry laughter at the spectacle of Thornton Hill. Had he been clothed as a Zulu chief or as an Arctic explorer, he was armed, he was the law and he had them both!

Temporarily, they no more than knew of the existence of the lady in the much flowered wrapper who tottered into the room, set her lamp upon a desk just as it was about to fall from her palsied fingers and gasped:

"Oh, my laws! Oh, my sakes! Oh, Thornton! Oh, for the land's sake, Thornton, who'd ever thought—me being left here all alone and a thing like this—"

"You just turn up that light a little and don't you worry none, Miss Codd," the constable said sternly.

Jane Fayre's stricken heart, alternately seeking to burst and to dematerialize altogether, stopped short!

Miss Codd! That would be the justice's sister, who had witnessed her terrible wedding! And once Jane turned, she would be recognized and the book would be brought to light, did the lady's memory need any refreshing, and her true identity would be known!

Sick and cold, she swayed against Wilbur Farnham, caught his growl, which was meant to be reassuring, and gripped herself determinedly.

It would all be over now in a matter of a few seconds and she could not stand the suspense. Jane shut her teeth and suddenly, defiantly, turned upon the lady.

And as suddenly her brain whirled and her heart began to pound again. Small good as the respite might do, she was not yet to be recognized, for this Miss Codd was plump where the other had been lean, and this one's hair was dark and streaked with gray where the other's had been sandy.

Yet, even by her sudden turn and her stare, Jane had registered a definite impression, for the lady's hands clutched her bosom and she shrank back crying:

"Oh, and a woman burglar! A *woman* burglar! And—oh! oh, the brazen way she stares at me, Thornton! I—I—"

"Miss Codd, you just collect yourself and don't you worry none!" the constable repeated. "I'm right here on the job and there ain't anything going to happen to you now. Whar's Lem?"

" 'Way over to the fair, Thornton!" Miss Codd faltered. "Him and Nettie and Dora and Bob started off yesterday mornin' and they won't be back till to-morrow mornin'. They wanted me to keep house and look after the hens, Lem did, and—"

"I guess they'll think you looked after it, when you caught a couple o' burglars!" Thornton Hill chuckled, advancing upon Mr. Farnham. "Gimme your gun!"

"I have no—" Farnham began thickly; then a weak smile came to his lips. "Yes, I have, too. I'd forgotten it!"

The constable accepted one automatic pistol with a grunt.

"Funny you'd forget it, when you only bought it this afternoon—although the Lord knows where you found it up in these parts. I was saying, not two hours ago, that the only reason I was alive was that you hadn't no gun!"

"You—you seen 'em before?" the lady of the house cried.

"*Seen* 'em!" said Mr. Hill, amazedly. "Why, these two's the most desperate pair o' crooks that ever came into the county, Miss Codd! This feller tried to kill me, right out to Lizzie Turner's place, 'bout two o'clock this afternoon, and—"

"And her such a nice looking young woman, too!" Miss Codd broke in. "I dunno what girls are coming to these days! My cousin Arthur, down in the city, he wrote me last week that his wife's sister's daughter—and her a girl brought up as careful as—"

It seemed to Jane that she was going mad. A very similar impression had come to Mr. Farnham many seconds before; and he had fought it valiantly and now he had conquered it and was at least able to speak coherently.

"Madam, please!" he cried. "It's all interesting, of course, but it's out of place here. We're not—"

"Shut up!" thundered the constable.

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" snapped Farnham, with an assurance which, directed into happier channels, should have won him millions. "We're in an unusual situation here and appearances are rather against us; but there is nothing that cannot be explained if you'll give us the opportunity. We—"

There was a thrilling little period in which apoplexy fought hard to detach the immortal portion of Thornton Hill from the mortal. Veins swelled in his official forehead and his face turned purple and his breath came in noisy gasps; but his voice returned to him at last and he shouted:

"I dunno how much of a fool I look, young feller, and I dunno what kinder fools you're used to talking to, but there's limits t' me! I swear t' Moses I always been known as an officer that did his duty and did it clean, but if I listen t' much more of that I'm goin' t' lose my temper an' blow your head plumb off!"

His weapon vibrated dangerously under Mr. Farnham's nose; his eyes gleamed, too, and Jane caught her companion's arm suddenly and pleaded:

"Oh, don't—don't say any more! Please don't! He might—"

"Yes, I guess he might, from the looks of him!" Wilbur Farnham conceded, thinly.

The constable had turned to the new Miss Codd.

"You ain't so skeered now?" he asked considerately.

"Not near so skeered, Thornton."

"Then if you can write, I wish you'd get out a piece of paper and jot down the charges against these two," Mr. Hill pursued, unimpressed by the cold dignity into which, however forlornly, Mr. Farnham had retreated again. "I'm supposed to turn prisoners over t' Lem, y' know, with the main facts of the case, and I might as well have the facts ready for him in the morning, in case this crime wave spreads and calls me away again. You ready, Miss Codd?"

"Yes," the lady said excitedly, poising her pen.

"Wotcher name again—Fenwick?"

"Correct."

"First name?"

"William," said Mr. Farnham bravely.

"What made *her* call you Wilbur this afternoon?" the constable asked unexpectedly. "However—don't matter. I ain't got any idee you're telling the truth about any o' the names, but something has to go on record. You claim this other party's your sister?"

"Most certainly!" said Farnham glibly.

"Put her down for that, anyway," directed the constable. "Got it, Miss Codd? All right! Now for the charges against 'em—you better number these as you set 'em down, so's we won't lose track of them. Number one: Stealing one automobile from party or parties unknown!"

"About that car, we didn't—" Mr. Farnham began helplessly.

"Stealing one automobile, number one," Thornton Hill repeated imperturbably. "Number two: Exceeding speed limit in same!"

The pen scratched busily.

". . . limit in same!" Miss Codd echoed dutifully.

"That's when they got away from me before; must 'a' been going seventy miles an hour, too," observed the constable. "Charge number three: Driving same with fake numbers made out of pasteboard."

". . . pasteboard!" said his amanuensis.

Thornton Hill's grim smile grew more sinister, more triumphant.

"You ready for charge number four?" he asked. "All right; charge number four: Defrauding Lizzie Turner outen three dollars, same to have been paid her for a meal she furnished them."

"Did they manage to do that?" the recorder asked wonderingly.

"They done it after a struggle," said the constable. "Got it down? Lemme see. Charge number five: Assaulting an officer of the law with intent to kill—I oughter put that first, because it's the most important, but never mind so long's we've started the other way."

The mild Miss Codd glanced fearfully at the pair and wrote as directed.

"Number six: Resisting arrest! I'm going to make that a separate charge, so's they'll get every year in prison that's com-

ing to 'em!" Mr. Hill said viciously. "Number six, resisting an officer."

"The gal, too?"

"She helped," the pitiless one said briefly, leaning on the desk and surveying the abandoned couple, who were standing limply now and holding each other's hands rather like thunderstruck children. "Got room on that sheet for charge number seven? Better take another, anyway, Miss Codd. Charge number seven: wilfully and maliciously running down Joe Cook, wrecking his new wagon and ruining his turnip crop. Total damage—including the damage to his feelings, I take it from what he said—total damage, one thousand dollars!"

"Man!" breathed Wilbur Farnham. "That Cook person was on the wrong side of the road, for one thing, and for another he—"

The constable sneered mightily.

"They're always on the wrong side of the road," said he. "Got that all jotted down, Miss Codd? Charge number eight, then: carrying concealed weapons. That only goes against the man."

"Say! I have a permit for that, at least!" Mr. Farnham cried hopefully.

"With you?" the constable inquired, and his disappointment showed plainly.

"No, it is at home, but—"

"Charge number eight: carrying concealed weapons without no permit!" yawned Thornton Hill.

And then, his information appearing to be right up to the minute, he continued briskly: "Charge number nine; stealing one set of license numbers from Nathaniel Briscoe's car, the same standing in his barn at the time. Nat telephoned in about that around ten o'clock and I see the same numbers is on this car outside. Got charge number nine?"

"Yes! Is they many more, Thornton?" Miss Codd wanted to know.

The constable relaxed condescendingly, for the heavy part of his night's routine was over.

"Nope, just one more," he said simply. "Charge number ten: burglary!"

The pen scratched on, while the constable, with a keen eye on the desperate twain, examined his pistol pensively.

It would have been proper, of course, for Mr. Farnham, amused and angered, to break into impassioned speech at this point, searing the loutish Thornton Hill with his words, battering down his imbecile charges and reducing the law's representative to an apologetic pulp.

Yet it was bitter fact that Mr. Farnham could not even have asked for a match just then without stammering and jumbling his words. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; his dumfounded eyes merely stared at the constable and his gaping assistant—and now the constable laughed cynically.

"I ain't going to stay around here after my term runs out next year, Miss Codd; I'm going down to New York and git on the detective force," he said modestly. "I got a—I dunno just what to call it. It's a sort of gift, I guess. I just *knew* these two was going to hit Batesford before morning, somehow! When that car stopped out in front o' my house, I was up and dressing before I was wide awake."

"Law!" said Miss Codd.

"Yes, ma'am!" nodded Thornton Hill. "I was over t'that window before my eyes was open, and thar they stood, large as life and twice as natural, without no lights, right out in the middle of our street!"

"And you follored 'em here an' caught 'em!" the lady breathed admiringly.

"Yes, ma'am—but it wasn't no trick at that," smiled the law; and then, abandoning the bouquet bombardment of himself, he turned sternly to the prisoners. "Well, I guess I done enough for one night. I'll lock you two up and go home."

Wilbur Farnham's voice returned.

"You needn't do that!" he said eagerly. "We'll sit right here until—"

"Aw, shucks!" rasped the disgusted constable. "You'll get locked up just the same as if you was in rags, young feller—don't make no mistake about that. Then tomorrow morning Lem'll be back—justice o' the peace, y' know; you didn't know you was tryin' to rob a justice, hey?—an' he'll arraign ye both an' you can plead t' them ten charges, and then he'll commit you t' the county jail and we'll take you up there and hold you for trial in the November sitting! Right out this way. You walk ahead and don't try duckin'!"

His persuasive pistol indicated the path. Heads bowed, they moved from the little office, with the numb, insensate footsteps one uses in nightmares, out to the dark porch—but a porch dark only for a moment, for Mr. Hill's admirable flashlight blazed forth again and, curiously enough, pointed toward their car!

"Right along the path past the chicken

coop," the constable directed. "I dunno whether you knew it or not, but you parked your car right alongside the calaboose!"

Their shadows dancing crazily, they stumbled onward, and as the little building appeared in the full light, its true nature was but too apparent. Squat and square, the structure was of gray stone, with a steel door and two barred windows on the visible side.

Light under one arm, pistol in hand, Thornton Hill produced a mighty key and opened the door. He motioned them inward and they tramped on; and as an electric light was switched on, their dazed eyes took in a cold and forbidding interior.

Six cells, evidently, were ample for Batesford—back to back, three on one side and three on the other. Tremendous bars at the front of each, studded steel walls at the sides and back, gave an impression of utter invulnerability that turned Mr. Farnham's heart to throbbing ice.

And now, humming with affected unconcern, the constable took down keys from a hook in the corner and jingled his way to the nearest cell. One rattle and the door swung open.

"That's yourn!" the constable said briefly to Wilbur Farnham.

That gentleman's teeth gritted audibly. His eyes flamed suddenly and Mr. Hill cocked his gun with a startled:

"Don't you try none o' that on me! You raise a hand an' I'll shoot sure as—"

"Oh, Wilbur! Wilbur! Don't!" Jane screamed.

"All right, I—I will not!" Mr. Farnham mumbled, as he stepped through the barred doors.

"Clang!" said the door.

"I'll put you right next door, miss!" announced the constable.

"Clang!" said the second door.

"And I guess I won't waste no electric light on you, neither," concluded Thornton Hill, as he hung up his cell keys and snapped off the lights. "Good night!"

CHAPTER XX.

IN DURANCE VILE.

THROUGH the steely, stony gloom Wilbur Farnham's voice rang suddenly:

"Wait a minute!"

"What d'ye want?" Thornton Hill inquired, from near the doorway.

"Just to ask one favor!" the male prisoner pursued feverishly. "You look like a good, sensible fellow, constable. You've gone wild on this thing, but I can see it from your standpoint and I don't blame you a particle for what you're doing and I bear no hard feelings whatever—you understand that?"

"I hear you say it," the constable's voice stated.

"In fact, I'm bound to admit that you're the cleverest thing in constables this town is ever likely to get, but you're a good square fellow as well, and you will not refuse one a little favor. Turn on that light a minute and give me a pencil. I want to write a telegram to a friend in New York and ask you to send it off at once, *"collect!"*

"I couldn't do that!" said Thornton Hill.

"Why not?"

"No, siree! I wouldn't take that responsibility, young feller. It might be all right and then again it might not, but it ain't for me to say. Things like that have to be decided by Lem Codd. You gotter wait till morning."

A thin groan came from Mr. Farnham's cell.

"Con—constable!" he called gently. "Have you a really fine watch?"

"What?"

"I mean, a dandy, you know—solid gold, dead-beat movement, and so on."

"I got a watch that does me well enough!" the constable said suspiciously.

"Well, you haven't one as good as mine," the captive said eagerly, "and I'm going to make you a present of it, if you'll just send that one telegram for us. It's worth two hundred dollars and it's almost new. Even more, nobody in the world need ever know that you accepted it. I'll never say a word—if you'll only just shake up the telegraph operator and get that message off inside of an hour."

Half a minute, one entire minute, they waited breathlessly.

"Nope!" the constable said at last. "I'd like to oblige, but I couldn't do it. You'll have to wait and see Lem about it when you're arraigned in the morning."

He moved toward the door again and they heard the creak of the hinge as he drew it open.

"Wilbur!" Jane cried softly. "I have two rings, you know. They're not so very valuable, but one of them must have three hundred dollars' worth of diamonds in it.

I was just going to offer it to the Turner woman this afternoon, when—when things began to happen. Maybe he—"

"Yes, and I have another idea!" Mr. Farnham said. "Hey, there!"

"What on earth do you want now?" the law demanded.

"Just another minute's talk with you, old man," the prisoner answered, in quite honeyed tones. "Come over here. I don't want to shout this. Where are you now?"

"Right here," Thornton Hill said briefly, flashing his light for a moment.

"I have a little scheme that will do no harm to anybody and a great deal of good to some of us," the prisoner went on. "You see, officer, this whole thing is a mistake, and one for which I alone am to blame. Just what happened I'll tell you later on, when everything is settled happily, and you'll laugh with me; but for the present it is a terrible thing for a girl like my sister to be locked in a cell."

"Too bad she didn't think of it sooner," was the law's comment on this.

"That's your view, of course, because you don't understand," Mr. Farnham went on, "but neither view alters the main fact. I'd like to have you let Miss Fenwick out of here!"

"I don't doubt it, young feller!" the constable guffawed suddenly.

"And it can be managed in just this way," Farnham continued, patiently and persuasively. "She has rings with about—er—five hundred dollars' worth of stones in them, I believe. I have two hundred dollars' worth of watch. We'll give you that seven hundred dollars' worth of jewelry, my friend, and the story you'll tell to account for her escape is just this: I attacked you, and while you were fighting me she escaped! See?" concluded Mr. Farnham, brightly, almost hopefully.

"I see, but—"

"And you can take a club or something and bruise me up wherever it shows," the prisoner added. "I don't mind a particle if you knock me senseless and split my skull, only—*let her out!*"

There was naught but ominous silence from the constable's quarter. Then Jane felt called upon to do her little best.

"I will not permit that," said she, "but I can promise you something even better, constable. Set us both free and—"

"Do *what?*" exploded Thornton Hill.

"Set us both free and I will send you ten thousand dollars before to-morrow night—ten thousand dollars in actual money, placed in your hand as privately as you like by a messenger from my bank!"

"Or take the jewelry and let her go alone and that promise still holds good!" Mr. Farnham cried desperately.

Still there was only heavy silence for a long, long time.

"Will you—do that?" Jane asked thinly.

The voice of the law echoed coldly:

"Is they anything more either of you wanter say to me before I lock you up for the night?"

"Will you—"

"Because if they is, you better not say it!" the constable informed them furiously. "I dunno what kind o' crooked police they have in the towns you usually work, but this time you've hit an officer that can't be bribed."

"But ten thousand dollars!" Mr. Farnham choked. "Ten thou—"

"No, and ten million wouldn't be no temptation to me, even if I stood a chance of getting it," the grim voice concluded. "And they ain't just ten charges against you two now—they's eleven! Attempting to bribe an officer of the law, that's the eleventh! Good night!"

This time the door slammed violently!

To their stricken ears came the angry scrape of the key and the outraged mutterings of an honest man sore affronted. Then Mr. Hill's heavy step thumped methodically down the path—and if anything Batesford's night was really a little stiller than when they had studied it first.

Wilbur Farnham, having dropped to the edge of a pallet sufficiently hard to measure up to the reputation of similar pallets, stared unseeingly into the gloom for a little, stunned, yet with brain racing about wildly, like a rat in a cage, comprehending fully, yet wholly unable to realize the thing that had overtaken them!

Except for the construction a prejudiced and unfriendly mind might have put upon that burglary, they were innocent of any intent at wrong-doing; they were normal, usually sane, well-bred and well-educated young people of the better sort; neither of them had ever so much as gazed upon a real, live criminal at close range.

And yet they were locked up here in Batesford with eleven assorted charges against them; and even though he tried to force his native optimism up to the pitch of

a monomania, Mr. Farnham could see absolutely nothing better for the future than their arraignment and commitment to the county jail!

It was perfectly insane and impossible, of course, and at the same time it was going to happen.

And when it had happened? Mr. Farnham's head turned dizzy and he was forced to rest it against the cold steel.

For himself he cared not at all; many an innocent man has become outcast through no fault of his own. If friends and firm and everybody else chose to turn on him, once his identity leaked out, he could laugh at them all—so that the way opened to save Jane Fayre.

If frenzied mind could break steel bars, the jail would have been a mass of wreckage just then, as Mr. Farnham thought, and —how very still it was in there!

"Jane! Jane dear!" gasped the large young man. "Have you fainted?"

"No, Wilbur," a rather monotonous voice answered.

"You're crying, sweetheart?"

"I don't believe I could cry if I wanted to—now," Jane said dismally. "I don't want to."

"You poor little kid!" cried Wilbur Farnham. "Why in the name of a merciful Heaven did you ever lay eyes on me? Why did that fool of a Weston ever send me with you? This is all my fault and now—"

"Hush!" the beloved voice said, so calmly that Mr. Farnham gripped himself. "It isn't your fault at all, Wilbur, dear. It is my fault."

"But if I had never conceived the crazy notion of breaking into that house—"

"Silly or not, dear, you did it for my sake," came gently from the adjoining cell, "and if I hadn't disobeyed and followed you, you might never have been caught. If I had been in the car I could have given some kind of warning when I saw the constable coming and—"

"Yes, and you might have startled the fool so that he opened fire on you, Jane! No, you did a wise enough thing in leaving the car; but to think that my thick-headedness has brought you to *this* nearly drives me mad!"

"Wilbur, dear, don't be absurd," the voice next door pleaded. "It hurts me so to think that you may suffer on my account —that you *will* suffer!"

"Jane!" young Mr. Farnham cried wildly. "For your sweet sake I'd let them cut me up in little pieces and—"

"Sssh!"

"And the worst of it is," Farnham groaned, "that we're no nearer Thompson than we were at the beginning!"

Jane laughed forlornly.

"I'd forgotten all about Thompson," she said.

The dreadful stillness settled down upon them once more, broken through many long minutes by a heavy sigh on one side of the steel partition or a rumbling, throaty sound on the other.

But the rumbles ceased after a time and a period of deep thought followed in Mr. Farnham's cell. When he spoke again his voice was altogether calm.

"Jane, dear," he said, "there are some things in this world that simply *cannot* be, and our staying in this jail over night is one of them!"

"I'm afraid, Wilbur—"

"There's some way out!" Mr. Farnham announced with conviction. "If I could have got a message through to old Pete Fellowes, I'd know that he would be here before noon with a couple of thousand dollars and all the legal wits that ever grew in one head, and we could go to sleep happy. But that fell through because there was some simpler way out of this mess, and I'll find the way!"

His flashlight snapped, and Mr. Farnham pressed close to the barred doorway of his prison cell and turned the brilliant circle from side to side.

Directly opposite them and across the narrow corridor stood the wall of the jail itself, with one window wide open and tastefully barred in steel. Through the window the softest of night winds floated to Mr. Farnham, but it bore no suggestions as to the path to freedom, and he turned the light down the corridor toward the entrance.

And as it fell upon the angle of the wall Mr. Farnham started and said suddenly:

"Jane! Can you see them?"

"I—I see the keys in the corner."

"So do I, my dear," said the large young man. "They're not eight feet from my hand at this minute!"

"But your arm isn't eight feet long, Wilbur," Jane murmured sadly.

"Nevertheless, my great brain may be a whole lot longer than that!" mused her fellow prisoner. "Look at 'em! There are six different keys, one for each of these

cells—and that big fellow is the key to the outside door! Why haven't I got ten feet of good stiff wire rolled up in my pocket, or—how many hairpins have you, Jane?"

"You mean wire ones?"

"Of course."

"None!" said Jane, sadly. "I don't use them."

"Neither do I," sighed Mr. Farnham, "but that needn't stop us. Here! We can do without wire altogether. Here's my key-ring—I can bend that into a hook."

There came a rattle of keys and a grunt or two. Inside Farnham's cell the light flashed about and a sound of ripping followed that, and then:

"She's all rigged, Jane! They have nice, tough unbleached sheets on this cot, and I've got a line here strong enough to pull down the wall of the jail, once I land that hook! Reach around here, dear, and hold the light for me."

Cool, soft fingers met his own. He paused to press them, and then, with an effort, released the fingers and considered the distance to the precious keys in the patch of bright light.

He squinted, did Mr. Farnham, and reached one hand from his cell, twirling his hook, with its weight of perfectly respectable bachelor keys. He sent the hook into the air and a length of fuzzy line followed it.

"*Can you beat that!*" young Mr. Farnham cried jubilantly. "I landed them first crack!"

"And if you just jerk gently you can get them loose!" Jane added excitedly.

"You'll never see anything more gentle and deft than this jerk!" said Farnham. "Just about two minutes, and we'll be out of this!"

He twitched, and the keys remained upon their hook. He twitched again and still they clung. For the third time, however, he twitched—and this time, with a tremendous jangling, the keys fell to the hard concrete floor and Wilbur Farnham dashed little beads from his forehead.

"I think that's the most thrilling minute I ever spent," said he. "Now we'll haul in!"

No freak of Jane's imagination had been that peculiar scraping sound, fifteen seconds back! There was a creak now, as the door of the jail opened suddenly, and a snap as the lights went up.

Violently, Mr. Farnham tugged at his string, but it was all too late.

The official foot of Thornton Hill had landed upon the slender strand that might have saved them!

CHAPTER XXI.

TO BE IDENTIFIED AT SUNRISE.

WITH a little cry Jane had shrunk to the rear of her cell, but Wilbur Farnham remained in plain sight and through him the eye of the law drilled fiercely, bitterly, yet triumphantly.

"Didn't get away with that, neither, did you?" Thornton Hill demanded.

Mr. Farnham was discreetly silent.

"You can't put over anything like that on me!" the law pursued angrily, as he picked up the keys and—if minor jinglings told truly as he stepped out of sight for a moment—hung them upon another, more distant and quite invisible hook in the far corner. "You ought to know that by now!"

"Oh, if you had only kept that ivory head on the pillow for another ten minutes!" came heartbrokenly from Farnham.

"I ain't been in bed, young feller!" the constable laughed harshly. "I had other things to tend to—such as keeping you from getting them keys and killing half the town before I got you again!"

And here an entirely new voice spoke:

"By crickey! They do look desperate!"

Mr. Farnham's tired and astonished eyes blinked at the person who had stepped to the constable's side, the while keeping comfortably near the outer wall.

He was small, with a mighty shock of roan hair; he had a long, thin nose and a pair of shell-rimmed spectacles, which gave him the air of a peculiarly underfed young owl. He might have been twenty-four, and if the collar he had forgotten was no more immaculate than the shirt it failed to adorn, it was well that he had left it behind.

Staring at the apparition, it seemed to Mr. Farnham that he had but one enviable quality; he was on the right side of the bars.

Still, he seemed to be an intimate of the gifted Thornton Hill since that gentleman had gone to the length of bringing him for a call at two o'clock in the morning. He stared owlishly as the constable's rather airy voice said:

"Yep! They're about as desperate as they make 'em, but they didn't git by me, Chester—you notice that!"

"I see they didn't, Thornton; I see they didn't!" the perfect stranger agreed admiringly.

"What is it, constable?" Mr. Farnham asked. "Why did you bring it here?"

"Well, this is Mr. Chester Patterson," the constable explained. "He's the reporter up this way for a lot of New York papers."

"Hey?"

"So there you are, Chester," concluded Mr. Hill. "I promised you I'd give you first whack at interviewing the first outside crooks we picked up here. Go ahead an' interview 'em. I wanter get to bed."

Yawning, he stood aside. Young Mr. Patterson, having cleared his throat, nodded toward the cells.

"How de do?" he said cordially.

There was no response at all. The representative of the press waited a moment and glanced at Mr. Hill.

"I—I guess I'll have a talk with the girl first," he remarked, "and see what I—"

"You guess again and maybe it'll save your life!" shot from Mr. Farnham's cell.

"Here, you!" the constable cried, with a start.

"*You* dry up! I'm not talking to you!" retorted the male prisoner, as he pressed against the bars, breathing hard and scorching Mr. Patterson with his gaze. "Just listen to me a minute, shrimp, and then run! I'm not going to be in this cell very long, and even if I should die here I've plenty of friends who would be glad to take the job after one look at you.

"I don't know how that clown came to bring you here, you nasty little runt, but I give you my solemn word of honor that if you address one solitary word to that young woman—yes, if you even look into her cell!—I'll kill you just as sure as there is a sky above us!"

He was, of course, very much overwrought. Had he been free, it is unlikely that even in his present state Mr. Farnham would have done more than shaken Mr. Patterson until his teeth rattled and snarled at him until sheer fright rendered him unconscious.

But he made a fearsome picture, nevertheless, as he clutched the bars of his cell and shook them, his face white as snow and his eyes burning like hot coals.

"Holy Moses!" murmured Chester Patterson.

"Don't you—don't you take no account of his ravings!" the constable counseled rather hoarsely. "He can't get loose. You go ahead and interview 'em!"

For the most minute fraction of a second Mr. Patterson's eye met Mr. Farnham's.

"Thornton, I don't want to!" he said flatly. "I don't believe it would be worth a cuss as an interview, anyway. They wouldn't tell the truth about anything and—and—no, sir, it wouldn't be worth while."

The constable also had been studying Mr. Farnham.

"Just as you say, Chester," he remarked readily. "You know more about interviewing than I do. Come on home, then."

He started briskly for the door and Mr. Patterson followed with no hesitation whatever. Near the entrance, however, the representative of the press paused to mop his high forehead.

"Thornton," he said softly, "that girl isn't a crook!"

"Well, when you know as much about her as I do—" the constable began dryly.

"She isn't a crook—or if she is, she's one of these real society crooks," the other said stubbornly. "I got one good look at her face, just when we came in, before she covered up her head with that cloak!"

"And I suppose you're so bright you can just take one look and tell all about 'em, hey?" Mr. Hill chuckled. "Mebbe so."

"It isn't that!" the press persisted. "I've seen her picture!"

"Where?"

"I'm trying to think, but I've seen it—and I've seen it within a month at that," Mr. Patterson said. "Seems to me it was in a magazine. Yessir, it *was* in a magazine, Thornton, and I've got that magazine somewhere in my room, among a thousand or so of them!"

"I don't believe it," the constable affirmed.

"Well, I know it. And I'll find that magazine between now and sunrise and you'll know a lot more about your prisoners than you do now!" the other cried, excitedly. "Yes, siree! It's that girl and it isn't any other girl in the world! She was sitting astraddle of a little horse and she had one of these polo clubs in her hand."

"Well, if that's so—"

"It's so, Thornton!" said Chester Patterson. "And her name's under the picture, and it isn't Fenwick, either. I can't for the life of me think what it is, but it isn't Fen-

wick. But don't you fret! I'll have that picture in your hands before you have breakfast—and *I think* she's rich!"

"I never met no really rich burglars, Chester," the law chuckled, as it switched out the light. "Come along."

"Then I'll introduce you to one!" said the enthusiastic voice. "And—why, by crickey, Thornton! This'll make one of the biggest sensations that ever got into print! This is going to bring reporters up from New York and—everywhere! I'll make a hundred dollars out of this if I make a cent, because—"

The door closed with an echoing clang.

In the outer world, mercifully indistinguishable now, Chester Patterson's words melted into the velvet night. It seemed a long, long time before Wilbur Farnham could summon courage to ask thickly:

"He—he wasn't right, Jane?"

"About the picture? Yes!" said Jane's dull voice.

"It's really in a magazine?"

"In two of them."

"But not with your name?" Mr. Farnham insisted.

"My name is there too, of course. It was taken down on Long Island, when we began to organize the polo team and never finished it. Oh, yes, my name is there in big type!" sighed Miss Fayre.

"Good Heavens!" gasped Farnham.

"What can it matter now, Wilbur?" asked the colorless voice in the next cell.

"Matter? Can't you realize that, once they've established your identity, Jane, fifteen minutes of telephoning to New York will confirm it and bring a flock of reporters up this way that will fill a special train. You're an heiress, Jane, and a society girl and all that sort of thing and—"

"I used to be," Jane laughed faintly. "Don't worry about the picture, Wilbur. The crash may come sooner than that."

"Why?"

"As soon as Codd returns, he'll come to look at us. He will remember me, I'm pretty sure, at first sight; and he had a vague idea when—when *that* happened—that I was staying in Batesford. Once he finds me in jail, he'll remember about Edith and it can't be more than ten minutes before he'll stir up a dozen people who remember me clearly.

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about the picture, Wilbur—but I do wish there was some way of getting *you* out of it, dear!"

"Pah!"

"It wasn't your muddle, Will. I never should have told you."

"Well, it's my muddle now—my own private, personal muddle! And I'll see it to a finish and lick it and get you clear of it, if I drop dead at the end of the job!" Mr. Farnham said fiercely. "Now we'll drop that nonsense and see just what we're going to do next."

Jane sighed heavily.

"It will not be breaking jail, Wilbur," she remarked.

"No, I'm inclined to agree with you, dear," Mr. Farnham confessed. "It's too bad, too! I had it all planned so nicely. We have gas enough to take us back to that little place with the garage where the old man sat outside—did you notice him?—and I meant to offer him my watch and—however, brooding over that gets us nowhere."

"Justice Codd might be willing to—to keep things quiet," Jane hazarded.

"Would the Patterson thing?"

"Perhaps, if he was paid."

"Jane, dear, long before we get anything to pay him with, that shaggy little brat will have used up his savings bank account telegraphing details," Mr. Farnham sighed. "We'll have to try borrowing the price of a telegram from the judge, I suppose. Do you want to communicate with your people first?"

Before Jane's cell a vision seemed to float—a vision of Uncle Horace Porter-Preston, prominent and stern and wealthy, a person of parts and position and all the rest; and of Aunt Martha, whose standard of proprieties had been settled forever in a far less liberal era than the present.

With a sudden shudder, she recalled the dreadful evening that had seen her first, her last and her only venture to the opera with Jack Weston, unchaperoned. That had been innocent enough and she had had no thought of shocking Aunt Martha—but it had been nearly half-past three in the morning before Aunt Martha came to the end of her horrified dissertation.

"Oh, I'll have to! I'll have to!" Jane cried, tremulously. "It was bad enough before, but when they find out that we're in jail—"

"Well, don't cry, child! Don't cry! I'll study out a way, somehow or other, of making things easier."

After that came another long period of

silence, while Mr. Farnham studied, presumably, and Jane, crouching in the blackness of her cell, declined to think at all. For now there was nothing ahead but to-morrow—to-morrow and Uncle Horace on the edge of apoplexy and Aunt Martha weeping soundlessly, endlessly, into a little lace handkerchief, and lawyers and gaping yokels and the ridiculous constable and his complainants and—

"There are so many blamed *queer* things connected with this affair!" the large young man reflected aloud. "All that news of Thompson's racing to New York, when he wasn't going there at all; and the news that he was still here when apparently he's never been here. And then that marriage certificate, Jane! Upon my word, I think that's the queerest one of all!"

Save for a faint and shaky sigh, there was no response from the cell next door. Mr. Farnham, edging back on his cot, disposed himself with what comfort might be and settled down for a long, grim spell of analysis.

"Miss Fayre!" whispered strangely through the gloom!

"Did you speak, Will?" Jane asked.

"Eh? No, dear!" the large young man said, rousing slowly.

"Miss Fayre! Are you there?" asked the elusive spirit voice.

"Yes, I—I'm here!" answered Jane, quickly. "Who is that?"

"Miss Fayre, stretch out your hand!" the sibilant tone hissed. "Stretch it out from your cell. There! Got it?"

"I haven't—anything!" Jane quaked. "Who is that? Wilbur! Wilbur!"

"Don't be frightened, Jane. I'm right here!" Mr. Farnham said breathlessly. "Where in blazes did I put that infernal light? Where—ah, here it is!"

With a click, the brilliant beam flashed out, sweeping the corridor, sweeping toward Jane's cell. There was never a sign of human form!

But as the light moved to the floor it stopped suddenly upon a square bit of paper. Mr. Farnham, bending forward, babbled incoherent amazement just as Jane, also bending forward, screamed:

"It's the certificate, Wilbur! It's the certificate! It has come back again and—Take it away, Wilbur! I'm afraid of it!"

Be it not denied that Wilbur Farnham's scalp prickled oddly and that a queer, chilly little sensation ran down his spinal column.

"Don't—don't be frightened, Jane!" he stammered. "That—that can't harm you, dear."

For the time he was capable of no further comfort. His light flashed at the barred window in the opposite wall, a penetrating light that showed clearly fully fifty feet beyond their prison.

Only black, empty night lay on the other side of those bars!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PLAIN TRUTH.

JANE'S courage snapped!

Full enough, two minutes ago, of a sort of forlorn bravery that was mainly resignation, a low, terrified cry left her lips as the light shone out into the unanswering night. Nor did any light laugh issue from Mr. Farnham's compartment.

Eyes popping from his head, he turned the light downward again, more than half expecting to find the floor bare of paper. It was not so; the marriage certificate, caught in a light puff of wind, danced uncannily toward him as if daring him to touch it—and by no will of his own Mr. Farnham backed deeper into his cell!

"Wilbur!" quavered Jane's thin tone. "Do you think—do you think—"

"I don't know what to think, Jane," young Mr. Farnham said hoarsely. "I—"

"Lady!" whispered the outer night. "Did you get it?"

With a strange little shout, Mr. Farnham whisked his light at the window once more—and his astounded heart beat again! There, on the other side of the bars, no less a person than Cragg stared in at them!

But, even at the first sight, he was a different Cragg. All the furtiveness had dropped from the little driver; his eyes sparkled straight at them, squinting in the strong light.

He shaded them quickly and peered toward Jane's cell.

"Is that you, lady?" he asked.

"Yes!"

"Mr. Farnham there, too, the way they said?"

"Yes!" that person answered for himself.

"Is there any one else in there?" Cragg asked quickly.

"No!"

"Fine!" said the mysterious chauffeur. "Don't make a sound! Wait a second!"

"Cragg!" demanded Farnham, "did you —did you drop that certificate in here?"

"Sure I did."

"Where did you get it?"

"I picked it out of your pocket before I sneaked. I lost it there in the camp when you shook me so hard that night. But the lady can have it now!" Cragg cried happily. "The lady can have it now, and—boss, will you please not talk for a while or make me talk back? This hick policeman might wake up, or something!"

To some extent, at least, he had sent grateful elucidation hissing into their cells —and he was gone again!

With a great sigh, Mr. Farnham kept his light on the window, wondering, trying to deduce just what combination of circumstances had sent Cragg, who desired nothing but flight from them, straight back to them an altered man. He gave it up rather promptly, for the little chauffeur had risen into sight again and something clanked softly against the heavy stone of the jail window-sill.

"Douse the glim, boss!" he directed, sharply. "I can see fine without it—the moon's coming out in a minute. . . . They ain't steel!"

"What?"

"Psst! The bars—they might be bum steel or soft iron. I dunno which yet, but—that's the boy! That's the baby! Don't shoot that light over this way now, on your life, boss!"

From the window a soft, metallic clink-clink-clink came steadily. Followed after a minute a faint squeak, an odd, intermittent crunching and finally a chuckle from Mr. Cragg.

"They're like cheese!" said he.

"What are you doing?" Mr. Farnham hissed.

"Putting the big jack from the car on these bars, boss, and it ain't going to be three minutes before I have 'em tied in knots," the chauffeur whispered. "Two of 'em's bent double now and—say!"

"Yes?"

"Was the farmer cop lying when he said the cell keys was in there?"

"Did he *tell you* that?" Mr. Farnham gasped.

"He didn't mean to," the driver said impatiently. "Are they?"

"I think so."

"Elegant!" breathed from the window. "Can the chatter now, boss!"

The clink-clink-clink went on swiftly. Divers crunchings, too, bore their own inspiring message through the next interminable five minutes. And then there was a thud outside and Cragg's excited gurgle of:

"I hope the guy that stung 'em with them bars has good luck for the rest of his life—they ain't a thing but putty. I'm coming in."

An instant the light flashed at the window. And whatever Mr. Cragg's unaccountable inaccuracies in the past, he spoke the simple truth just now. Through a maze of wonderfully curved bars, the driver's small anatomy was worming its way into prison—and now a soft thump announced that he had attained his goal.

The stunned and murky organ in Mr. Farnham's cranium had departed. In its place now was the lively and capable brain that had served him well through so many years, buzzing along intelligently as ever!

"Right over in that corner, Cragg—to your left!" he whispered. "The keys are on a hook in the angle, I think, about five feet up from the floor. Do you want the light?"

"You might slip it here, boss," chuckled the driver. "We don't want to lose no time now!"

His quick fingers snatched the electric lamp and were gone again, as Cragg's light feet took him over the hard floor. A faint little jingle sounded through the prison and the shuffle was returning; and with a single brief flash to locate the keyhole, a key worked in the door of Jane's cell, crunched, grated and turned!

"Come out, lady!" the noble driver said, in an odd, choking voice. "Now for you, boss. This looks like it. . . . Yes, this is it! There!"

It is possible that Wilbur Farnham need not have been ashamed of the little lump which rose briefly in his throat. Keys in hand and with at least a splendid fighting chance for freedom, they stood there while all of Batesford slept—where not ten minutes back his very soul had turned sick at the thought of sunrise.

And for this they had only the hard little chauffeur to thank—and the chauffeur, by the way, was living up to his previously established reputation for eccentricity. Light shining dimly on the picture as Mr. Farnham shielded the flashlamp under his coat, the large young man stared in astonishment at Cragg.

The little driver was standing squarely before Jane, hands outstretched appealingly, every inch of him denoting supplication!

"Lady!" choked Mr. Cragg. "I guess I squared it now! Say it, lady! Say I squared it now!"

"Cragg, you're—you're a dear!" Jane's difficult voice said.

"Lady, you'll never squeal on me now?" begged the strange driver!

"I'll—what, Cragg?"

"You'll never squeal!" said Mr. Cragg. "Because, I wanter tell you, lady, I never done a crime before, and I never done one since. I'm an honest, hard-working guy and always was up t' the day I met Thompson and—"

"Huh?" gasped Mr. Farnham.

"It's on the level, boss! I hope t' drop dead if it ain't on the level! And I dunno what got into me that night, except he scared the wits outen me. But, I wanter tell you, I ain't had an easy minute since! My conscience has been burning inside o' me like a stove full o' hot coals."

"Cragg!" Jane cried. "What—whatever are you talking about?"

"Why, lady," the chauffeur said, rather blankly, "don't you know me? Didn't you know me when you first set eyes on me?"

"I never saw you before you came around with the car, Cragg."

"Well, lady, I'm the guy that was with Thompson in that house that night, and I dropped out the back window while he was hauling you in at the side! I thought you seen me—I thought you knew me when you looked at me first!" the person with the astonishing conscience stammered. "I thought you was waiting, for your own reasons, t' squeal on me when the proper time came. And then, when I heard we was headed for Batesford, I was dead sure you was wise and—and trying to get me back where the crime was committed."

Unable for the moment to speak, Jane said nothing at all! Her driver came nearer and rushed on:

"Lady! *You* know Thompson — the heartlessest, cold-bloodedest murderer that ever walked in shoes! Well, he come back to me that night and gimme that marriage certificate, and I thought you must 'a been crazy to marry him, but it looked genuine.

"Well, he gimme that certificate and said he didn't want it found on him, in case he couldn't make a getaway. He said if he *did* want it, though, that he'd send me a postal, and if it wasn't ready for him, he'd kill me and cut me up—*and he meant it, too, lady!*"

"Well, wait—" Mr. Farnham began.

"I'll wait in a second, boss, when I get this off my chest," Cragg said pathetically. "I guess you dunno what it is to have a thing like this on your conscience, waking you up in the middle of the night and scaring you stiff every time you met a guy over five feet tall on a dark street! So I stuck that paper away down in my pocket and it's been pinned to my shirt every night when I was asleep!

"That's right. I'd rather have lost my hand than lost that paper and—well, I didn't see him for more'n a minute when he came back, and then he beat it and I dug straight for Brooklyn, where nobody'd ever look for me, and I been working in a garage there ever since, up to last week. . . . And then I came over t' New York t' work an' when I see this lady walking out o' the house and she looked straight at me, I thought I'd drop dead there in the seat!"

A great, soul-deep gulp left Mr. Cragg, shivering off to a sigh.

"So I couldn't dope out what was happening to me, except that I wanted to get loose and work for somebody else," the driver pursued. "And then—back there in the camp—when the old gent says Thompson was here in Batesford, I got a line on what I wanted to do. All I wanted was to hand Thompson that paper again and run like mad, and I thought most likely I'd get to Africa or somewhere and start life over again—that's why I hopped on the freight that was pulling through here."

"Cragg—" Mr. Farnham attempted again.

"So to-night, only an hour ago, down there at the hotel—to-night when I heard that crazy little guy with the mane and their rube cop and a couple more hicks talking about you being locked up here, I just listened and it seemed like it was Fate, for I could see how I could square the thing. I couldn't dope out how you happened to be in jail, but I knew it was you people. And I wanter say," Mr. Cragg ended suddenly, "that I'd have come up here and pulled this stunt just the same, even if you'd never had anything on me!"

"Well, I—I never did have anything on you, as you call it," Jane said, "but—"

Far away, floating through the still, dark

morning like a distant trumpet, a rooster crowed expressively.

A shock ran through Mr. Farnham! There were gaps in Cragg's tale, but they would have to be filled later and—

"Cut it short, friend—we appreciate what you've done for us just as much," he said swiftly. "It'll be daylight in another hour or less, and we've got to get out of this! We've gas enough—"

"I wouldn't start the car and risk waking them, boss," the helpful chauffeur said, as he headed for the door. "I was thinking about that when I came up. This here evening train from Montreal comes through here around three o'clock and she'll stop on signal. I was going out on her."

"You—can't ride to New York on one dime!" Mr. Farnham gasped. "That's all we have until—"

Out of the gloom came the scrape of the key and an even more welcome sound.

"Forget it, boss!" the glorious Cragg whispered. "I got nearly fifty dollars on me!"

Through the Batesford jail wafted a puff of fresher air as the door swung open. Wilbur Farnham, light extinguished, reached for Jane's hand, found and squeezed it. He caught a tiny sob of pure relief, and he was almost capable of pausing and soothing Jane; but Mr. Cragg, in the open doorway, hissed anxiously:

"Say! Could you please hurry up a little? I think we'll beat it around the other side of this house and cross the road up above."

"You know the way to the station?"

"Yes, boss!" said the invaluable eccentric, as he passed out. "Keep a hand on me here and don't flash that light."

Behind them, they caught the faint outline of Justice Codd's roof against the sky. There was a light in an upper window, too, where doubtless Miss Codd sat and pondered upon the eventful night—and the light sent them along at increased speed!

In a wide detour they hurried, soundless, almost unbreathing—out to the main road finally and across it, between a black house and a blacker barn, and then by a path to the road beyond. Here the going was easier, for it was a stretch of few buildings and some width; a stimulating stretch, too, for from it they could see the tracks and the signal lights on their tall posts.

And now, in the far distance, a whistle blew suddenly and all three jumped!

"That's it!" gasped Mr. Cragg! "Come on! We gotter beat it now for further orders!"

Pell mell down the black road, caution forgotten, light flashing here and there as they raced, the trio sped toward the station. A stray dog barked and set their feet fairly to flying. A rock sought to trip Wilbur Farnham headlong and came near to bringing a shout from him.

But they were on the downgrade and Cragg was tearing ahead, even as they caught the hum of a heavy train—yes, and now Cragg was on the platform of the deserted little building and swinging the red light left for possible travelers.

Into Batesford roared the long night express for New York city. And it paused and a conductor and a porter stepped down and looked about, finding a strange trio who lunged as one person at the Pullman steps. Then the express moved on again and three happy souls had been subtracted from Batesford's floating population.

Travel was light at this season, apparently; the sleeper was hardly half filled. With the wonderful Cragg's little roll of bills in his pocket, Mr. Farnham ceased being the panting refugee and became his rather impressive self once more, promptly commandeering the snug little stateroom for Jane and sending the black porter to bustling about therein.

The adjoining section would do surpassingly well for Cragg and himself. Even now the little driver had dropped upon one of its long seats and was mopping his forehead and looking at the last lights of Batesford, as the fast train gathered speed again and hurtled through the black morning.

At one side of the stateroom doorway leaned Jane Fayre, weary to the point of collapse, yet smiling as she watched the porter. At the other leaned Mr. Wilbur Farnham, also rather more tired than he had ever been before, but smiling at Jane.

For they were safe! With luck, their flight would not be discovered until after sunrise; even then, there would be none to tell of the direction they had taken and the chances were greatly in favor of Thornton Hill's organizing a posse and scouring the surrounding country before it occurred to him to wire after the night train. Wilbur Farnham smiled more widely.

"We're out of it, Jane, dear," said he. "We'll be back in the good old town before noon."

Jane nodded wearily.

"And after that, we'll have to turn lawyers and detectives loose on the case and hope for the best—and we'll get it, too," the young man purred on. "I'll send Fellowes up to talk to the justice, dear, and recapture your car. That, of course, was stolen from us. And he'll have that madhouse collection of charges taken from the record, too, if they have been set down formally. And I presume," mused Wilbur Farnham, aloud, "that he'll have to shoot the fear of the libel law into Chester Patterson, too, and perhaps a few dollars to make the fear stick."

Again Jane nodded. This time her hand nestled into young Mr. Farnham's and remained there. It was queer, but she knew perfectly that he would attend to everything better than any one else in the world.

"So the only really unfortunate thing left," he said, "is what we once supposed our greatest trouble, dear—Thompson. We'll have to find Thompson, and—Cragg!"

"Yessir?"

"Where *is* Thompson now?" Mr. Farnham asked.

Then he stared hard at Cragg, for the little chauffeur's mouth had opened wide and his eyes were blinking incredulously at the pair.

"Why—why—I told you about Thompson!" he stammered. "That was why I had the certificate with me still—that was why I was sticking around Batesford, happy enough to steal their jail, if it would do you folks any good! Why, sure!" said Mr. Cragg. "That's what the guy told me that works in the garage and knew Thompson; I only found it out two hours before I seen you. Thompson got shot over to Dunbridge the night after he pulled that burglar stunt in Batesford, and they buried him under the name of John Doe! Why, *Thompson's been dead all the time!*"

Pullman porters see many unusual manifestations of human emotion; it takes a good deal to make one of them, on duty, stop and stare squarely at a patron of the company.

But the porter in Jane's stateroom stopped with a jerk and stared at the pair in the doorway.

The beautiful girl and the tall young man gazed breathlessly at each other for several seconds. Over their features, amazed, celestial happiness crept swiftly; they swayed toward one another. And then they quite forgot that there were other eyes in the world.

Jane Fayre's arms went about Mr. Farnham's neck; Mr. Farnham's arms encircled Jane and held her very close. His eyes, looking down into her own soulful orbs, gleamed with a joy that was hardly of this earth.

Her eyes, looking up, seemed to be passing Mr. Farnham and gazing into Heaven itself!

"Oh, Will! Will!" cried the lovely young woman. *"Im a widow!"*

And the big, impressive young man, drawing her even closer, kissed Jane, long and lingeringly!

"My darling! Oh, my darling!" he babbled. "Who could have dared hope for *that?* He's dead! He's dead!"

What impressed the porter most—and this with a little chill, as sub-consciously, he supposed his own dark-complexioned lady to be in Jane's case—was that somebody had managed to depart from earth without leaving a pang of regret behind him!

But in the buffet, four cars ahead, some boiled eggs and a pot of coffee which he had acquired just as the red light stopped the train at Batesford, were cooling fast, and there were still two beds to be made in the section.

The porter turned from the picture in the doorway and smoothed Jane's blanket.

THE END.

KILLING TIME

IF you want to kill time,
I'll advise you in rime
How to do it;
It will go in a breath,
If you work it to death!
Now go to it!

Faye N. Merriman.

The Old West per Contract

by William Wallace Cook

A TWO-PART STORY—PART ONE.

CHAPTER I.

A CASTLE IN THE AIR.

FIVE battered railroad cars lay on a siding at Rocky Spur in the desert. Two of the cars were sleepers of an ancient and discarded pattern, another was a made-over coach used as a "diner," and the other cars were of the "box" variety—evidently veterans of the freight service.

Along the sides of this short but very special train were banners lettered in red, "Castle's '49 Camp."

The various members of the "camp" had gone to sleep among the semaphore lights and the clattering activities of a freight-yard of some importance; and they had awakened next morning to look out upon the great and forbidding loneliness that walled in that desert siding.

There their five cars had apparently taken root. Even Pop Handy, hardiest of the Forty-Niners and supposedly immune from nervous shocks, shuddered and wanted to know what it meant.

Rocky Spur afforded thirsty engines a chance to drink good water. On one side of the main track was a station about the size of a hat-box; on the other side were a water-tank and a shed that housed a fussy little gasoline engine that did the pumping. Nothing more.

Overnight the population of Rocky Spur had been increased to the extent of twenty Forty-Niners—and Mr. Amos Robbins. And every man and woman—except Amos Robbins and, presumably, Gordon J. Castle—was wondering why.

It was common knowledge that Castle had expected a concession for his camp from the Zone at San Francisco, only to find that his claim had been pre-empted by a similar organization. Then Castle had tried desperately to secure frontage on the Isthmus at San Diego, but without result.

Forced out of the big fairs, he had reared his stockade and planted his shanties in the environs of Los Angeles. The public did not seem to be interested, and Castle's Camp found itself on a financial reef and rapidly going to pieces when Amos Robbins suddenly appeared and averted disaster.

Robbins and Castle had a private conference. What passed between them they kept a close secret; and, on the following day, the Camp pulled up stakes, loaded live stock and paraphernalia in the box-cars, climbed aboard the sleepers and traveled East.

Robbins went along. One fact stood out clearly enough in all that maze of mystery, and this was that Robbins was captain of the new venture and furnished the money to keep it going.

Colonel Chet Hungerford allowed that they were going to Denver. Gentleman Jim rather opined their destination was the White City of Chicago.

Mrs. Bobbett, and Lady Ann Bobbett,

her daughter, sort of hoped that Gentleman Jim was right. Martin Reeves, however, had left the East to make his mark in the West, and if the Forty-Niners really had designs on Chicago he was prepared to resign well on the sunset side of Missouri.

Now all guesses were left more or less up in the air by that halt on the Rocky Spur siding, for there were indications that the stay was to be permanent.

Reeves, climbing down from Number One Sleeper, looked around at the hills reeling away into the horizon on all sides. Although mystified he was not disheartened.

A clear sky was overhead, a bright sun touched the hills rosily with high lights and lavender shadows, and there was a crisp tang to the air that quickened his pulses and inspired reflections on the beauty of life.

"Dear me!" murmured a voice behind him. "Marty, what does it all mean?"

He turned to behold Lady Ann, fresh and pretty as the morning itself, standing on the lower step of the car.

"Up so early?" he asked. "We needn't care what it means, Lady Ann," he went on, swinging her lightly from the step to the ground. "Any change in our fortunes could scarcely be for the worse. Just fill your lungs with this air, and be happy."

A tousled head was thrust from one of the car windows—a handsome blond head whose strong face and flashing blue eyes were those of a Viking.

"The Tenderfoot's advice is good, Lady Ann," said the man in the window. "This old world isn't half bad, if you'll only think so; and to the venturesome, let me remind you, all things are possible."

Miss Bobbett greeted this sally with a smile. Reeves, on the contrary, was not amused. Jim Rayner was all for Jim Rayner, a point which rather marred Jim Rayner's philosophy.

"Why don't you get out of that stuffy car, Gentleman Jim," urged the Tenderfoot, " and stir around a little before breakfast?"

"Every man his own way, Reeves," returned Gentleman Jim, smothering a yawn. "Exercise before breakfast never made much of a hit with me."'

Ann Bobbett and Reeves walked down the main track to the station, inspected the pumping plant and the water tank, and then strolled along a dim trail that apparently led over the hills to Nowhere. In this way an hour was consumed, and the gong of Ah Sin, the cook, reaching their ears faintly, caused them to hurry back to the "diner."

The Forty-Niners made it a point, each and every one, never to miss a meal. They were all at table when Lady Ann and the Tenderfoot dropped into their places.

At one end of the board sat Castle, and at the opposite end sat Robbins. The señorita flashed a gay look into the rosy faces of Miss Bobbett and Reeves.

"A long walk you have had with your caballero, Lady Ann," said the Mexicana, swerving her lustrous eyes for a moment upon Rayner. "Did it put an edge to your appetite, I wonder?"

"Don't wonder about that," spoke up Gentleman Jim cheerfully. "All the wonder, this morning, is reserved for Castle and Robbins. We wait with patience to have them explain why we are here."

The proprietor of the Camp looked dubious. The others gathered, from this, that he was perhaps not so well informed as they had supposed. Robbins laughed.

"At the other end of the table," said Robbins, "you behold a Castle in the air. He knows we are here for a purpose, and that you are to receive your board and keep and salaries. Also, he has substantial proof that our venture will be profitable to him personally. I am now about to ring up the curtain on the Big Idea. Before I do that, though, ladies and gentlemen, we must have a little understanding."

Ears were pricked up at this.

"I was afeared there might be a comeback to this run o' luck," muttered Catamount Cal, sadly. "It looked a heap too good to be true."

"What's the string to it?" inquired Billy Vince.

Castle made a reassuring gesture.

"Now don't go off the jump before Robbins tells you the rest of it," he urged. "The understanding is nothing more than a condition, easily complied with. Go on," and he finished with a nod to Robbins.

"Can you all be Forty-Niners for a month," asked Robbins, running his gaze comprehensively around the long table, "without side-stepping the old times and customs? I won't have any modern lapses. If there is a man or woman present who feels that he or she can't play a Forty-Niner's part every minute of the thirty

days, then we'll agree to disagree right here. Do you get what I mean?"

"Shucks!" grunted Pop Handy, "I don't see why."

"Me, nuther," added Catamount Cal. "I reckon it's as easy all o' the time as jest some o' the time. Purvidin'," he observed warily, "the board and keep and salaries happen along as per schedule."

"Wearing a gingham dress and a sunbonnet all the time certainly has its drawbacks," remarked Ma Bobbett; "and there are some other customs of nineteen-fifteen that will come hard to give up every minute of the thirty days. Still, as I says to Ezra, we can put up with a lot if we're paid for it."

"Bueno!" said old Garcia, the señorita's father, who waited on table with his son Pablo. "Me, I be dat Forty-Niner all my life, si, for cuarenta pesos a mont'. Eh, Pablo? Eh, Anita?"

"Sure!" agreed Pablo promptly.

The senorita nodded.

"But not more than one dance a day," she qualified, languidly. "To dance more is fatiguing."

Colonel Chet Hungerford looked his dismay.

"To wear that Starbottle make-up all the blessed time is some job," he said heavily.

"Go on!" returned Billy Vince, chuckling as he looked at the large man, "you can shuck it when you hit the hay, colonel."

"I'm game," the colonel declared, with fine spirit.

Perdue, the inoffensive little Bad Man from Bad Ax, looked questioningly at Golshaw, the Town Marshal.

"Abe," he faltered, "can we stage that hold-up every day for thirty days hand-running? It's an awful job!"

"It'll be a sight easier if Castle will cut out the Vigilance Committee," answered Golshaw. "Last time we pulled off the hold-up the Committee was too blamed energetic. Look at my eye," he appealed; "it's black yet."

"There'll not be much of that," said Robbins. "This scheme of mine is going to be different. You'll have a real camp, and you'll live in it as naturally as a lot of argonauts on Poker Flat. Furthermore, I'll not push you clear back into 'forty-nine.' I don't think you know a lot about those times, anyhow.

"What I want is an exemplification of the Old West, which was pretty general in the sixties, I'm told, and survived even into the early eighties, but which is now as dead as Cæsar everywhere on the Pacific side of the Rockies. I have certain ideas to be worked out, but we'll get to them later on. You'll have an easy time of it. It's up to me to make sure you'll play the rôles assigned to you without any backsliding. How about it?"

The response was prompt and hearty. Old Jack Lightning-that-Strikes, the Ute Indian, and Ah Sin and Sing Lee, cooks and laundryman, were the last to present themselves and give the pledge.

"All right, you're on," said Robbins. "I didn't think there'd be any objections and I'm glad to know I was right. Now I'll tell you part of the scheme. Fifty miles from Rocky Spur, in the heart of the wilderness, is a place called Rattlesnake City. I—"

"Busted minin' camp," interposed Catamount Cal. "Gold petered out there years and years ago. Ain't anybody lived in Rattlesnake City since nobody knows when."

"Town was deserted," put in Pop Handy. "Every one moved out, slick and clean, and buildings was left jest as they stood. But it was a right lively place while it lasted."

"You are right about the place," went on Robbins. "Gold was discovered in Rattlesnake Gulch 'way along back in the dim and misty past. Several adobe buildings were put up, and a number of shake shanties. The settlement thrived. Then, almost in one night, the knell sounded and all the inhabitants moved away. They couldn't take the buildings with them, and the adobes have been there ever since.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we're changing the name of Rattlesnake City to Nugget Notch. We're going over there and put the town on the map once more. Amid the lonesome hills, you Forty-Niners are to revive the glories of the past! And on this year of nineteen-fifteen we'll paste a luminous page from the dead and storied Days that Were. Do you get me? Miles away from civilization and progress, we'll all turn to and make of Nugget Notch a real, live old-time camp."

The proposition was amazing. Even Castle seemed bewildered.

"Where'll you get the crowd to see it?" gasped Colonel Hungerford. "Who'll come, and how'll they get to the place? Have you pondered on the difficulties of the enterprise, Mr. Robbins?"

"That's my lookout, colonel," answered Robbins crisply.

"I don't allow ary one o' them 'dobes has a whole wall or a roof left," spoke up Catamount Cal.

"Pardon me, Catamount," returned Robbins, "but you are wrong. At a cost of thousands of dollars I have prepared Nugget Notch for habitable purposes. The place is there and ready for you. These preparations were made some time ago, and I was planning to gather up my inhabitants from all over the Southwest when I heard of Castle's Camp and the financial struggle Castle was having to keep the enterprise alive. So, at one fell swoop as it were, I got my people for the Notch. I am prepared, if necessary, to spend fifty thousand dollars to make the scheme a success."

Martin Reeves had listened to all this in profound amazement.

Was Robbins crazy to spend all that money on such a wild venture in the heart of the desert? He appeared sane enough, save in this one particular.

While a tense silence prevailed in the car, Robbins got up from the table and unlocked a steel-bound chest that had hitherto escaped the notice of most of the Forty-Niners.

"Look!" said he calmly, lifting the heavy lid. "This ought to prove that I mean business, and that none of you will lose anything by falling in with the Big Idea."

There were yellow eagles in the chest, a great store of them, gleaming brightly in the sunshine that filtered through the dusty car windows.

"You may be mad as a hatter, Robbins," remarked Gentleman Jim, the glint of shining metal reflected in his blue eyes, "but the money talks. When do we start for Nugget Notch?"

"As soon as Castle can unload the plunder and get under way," Robbins answered, as he closed and locked the chest.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNANSWERED QUESTION.

THERE followed a busy forenoon for the Forty-Niners. Eight horses, four mules, a burro and a grizzly bear were unloaded from one of the box-cars. A prairie "schooner," a dilapidated old stage coach, a "democrat" wagon, harness, riding gear, baled hay, oats and an assortment of trunks and other equipment were removed from the other freight car and scattered about on the sandy level near the siding.

Martin Reeves made himself generally useful, and even Robbins had his coat off and was taking an active part in the proceedings.

Lafe Smedders, the cowboy, looked after the live stock. Old Jack, the Ute, gave personal attention to Hot Tamale, the bear, for Jack belonged to the b'ar, as Pop Handy put it, and no one but an Injun could get along with a grizzly nohow.

The noon meal was the last the Forty-Niners were to have in their "diner." The special would remain on the siding at Rocky Spur, under the eye of the telegraph operator, until such time as Castle's Camp should need it again.

Following the meal, trunks and other freight were piled into the "schooner" and a four-horse team inspanned. Four mules, meanwhile, had been hitched to the ancient stage coach, and a pair of smart drivers to the "democrat" wagon.

Four cayuses were put under saddle for Reeves, Jim Rayner, Lee Smedders and Lady Ann.

The operator at Rocky Spur and the man at the pumping plant had watched these preparations of the Forty-Niners in wonder and amusement. Under their eyes a queer procession presently began its trek along the dim trail.

Castle and Robbins occupied the front of the "democrat" wagon and led the way. In the seat behind them rode Ree Middling, the miner, with his picks, shovels, gold pans, horn spoons and other gold-hunting equipment.

After the leaders came the ancient coach, Catamount Cal handling the four-mule team and Ah Sin and Sing Lee riding beside him. Inside the coach, desperately uncomfortable with the heat and the jolting, were Colonel Hungerford, Don Quesada, Perdue and Golshaw.

Ezra Bobbett was at the helm of the "schooner." With him were Ma Bobbett, Billy Vince, the señorita, Pablo and Manuel.

Old Jack Lightning-that-Strikes bestrode Dynamite, the burro, and led on a long chain the churlish and panting grizzly.

Those on horseback brought up the rear. After hours of a most trying journey, during which Hot Tamale rebelled a number of times and had to be prodded and belabored by Lafe Smedders in order to make

him move at all, the Forty-Niners found themselves at sundown beside a water-hole in an otherwise arid plain.

Here they went into camp, all tired and most of them ill-tempered and thinking of their special train with sorrow and regret.

The animals were watered, fed and picketed. Ah Sin and Sing Lee made a fire of greasewood tops, set with two stones on either side of it, crossed them with iron bars and so had a makeshift stove on which they prepared supper. The meal left something to be desired, but it was hot and substantial, and under its spell the drooping spirits of the Forty-Niners revived.

"I know it's a hard pull, ladies and gentlemen," said Robbins, when the meal was finished and pipes and cigars were going, "but at the Notch you'll all find comfortable places prepared for you. Some time tomorrow afternoon we'll be where we're bound for, so keep a stiff upper lip and don't get discouraged."

"If you ever tried to ride in an old catamaran like that stage coach, Mr. Robbins," mourned Colonel Hungerford, rubbing his bruises, "you'd appreciate the difficulties of this sort of traveling. It's no democrat wagon, let me tell you."

"Ay de mi!" mumbled the don.

"It's hotter than Tophet in that old ark, and the way she pitches is somethin' terrible," said Golshaw.

"You fellers don't gi'me no room," remarked little Perdue. "If it's the same the rest of the way as it has been so far, blamed if I don't get up on top with Cal and the chinks—or else walk."

"Thunder!" growled Ezra Bobbett; "say, you all ort to be piled into the 'schooner' with them trunks if you want real ridin'. I don't know how ma and the senorita stands it. Me, I'm tough and good for anything, same's Pop Handy."

"When it comes to hard traveling," put in Lafe Smedders, "ain't no one got a thing on the Ute. Think of bein' chained to a ba'r and ridin' a jack-rabbit at the same time! Shoo! If Hot Tamale set down and stopped Old Jack and Dynamite onct, he done it a dozen times. I'm tellin' you that if the ba'r hadn't been muzzled he'd made a meal off'n Jack and the burro."

"Them in the democrat wagon and on the hosses has the best of it," said Catamount Cal. "But what's the odds! It's all in the day's work."

Evening brought with it a most refreshing coolness. The stars twinkled against a velvety, blue-black sky, and presently a round moon lifted itself above the dim horizon and trailed its glory across the forlorn plain and the ugly hills.

Reeves and Lady Ann strolled away from the camp and found a place littered with boulders, where they sat and listened to coyotes howling in the distance.

"Ugh!" murmured the girl with a shiver; "this would be beautiful if it wasn't for that howling."

"It is beautiful in spite of the coyotes, Miss Bobbett," returned Reeves. "Any place on earth, I think, would be wonderful with those stars, and the moonlight—and you."

"Why, Marty," said Lady Ann, "you're a poet!"

"No, Lady Ann, poets are out of place among these Forty-Niners. You are out of place among them, too. Didn't you ever think so?"

The girl stirred uneasily on the boulder. Her wide-brimmed straw hat lay on her knees, and the moonbeams shimmered on the brown tresses brushed back from her brow.

"There are two of us, Marty, when you come to that," said she, after a time. "I've wondered and wondered why you joined the Camp. You're so different from the rest of them."

"I'm an Easterner, you know," explained Reeves, "and this is my first visit to the West. I guess I thought I'd find the Old West, with money easy to come at and no difficulty in getting ahead; but the West is only the East, Lady Ann, with a geographical difference.

"I hunted for the Old West all the way to San Francisco, without discovering it. At the Golden Gate I found myself out of pocket and took the first job that came handy. Castle wanted a 'tenderfoot' and I filled the bill. But I feel like a square peg in a round hole, and that's a fact.

"It's good fun, though, trailing around with the Forty-Niners; and I must say that they come nearer my foolish ideas of the Old West than I had dreamed of finding. But it's a pose, a stage play. I'm with the crowd because I need the money. This scheme of Robbins's appeals to me—although I can't understand the move and I am afflicted with doubts."

"Doubts?" queried the girl curiously.

"Yes. What's the idea back of it all?

Why should any sane man spend fifty thousand dollars to put life into a played-out mining camp? Why pull a leaf out of the past and drop it down in Nugget Gulch? How can Robbins reap any profit from what he calls his Big Idea? He's not the sort of man to go into such a venture if he didn't expect to make something out of it. What can he make? And how?"

"I've thought of that, too. And mother and dad, they talked it over during the ride to the camp, back there, so mother told me. They're as much in the dark as anybody else. But dad says that he guesses we can stand it if we're getting paid for it; and that he's glad to be going anywhere instead of trying to find a job in Los Angeles."

"After the thirty days, what then?"

"The Bobbetts," answered the girl with a soft laugh, "never cross a bridge of that kind until they get to it. Something will turn up, dad says."

"I was offered a place by a real estate man in Los Angeles," said Reeves thoughtfully. "He wanted me to go to Imperial Valley and drive an automobile for land-seekers."

"Why—why didn't you take the job, Marty?" Lady Ann asked, a flutter in her soft voice.

"Well, because I wanted to stay with the Camp and be with you. Now you have it, Lady Ann. We have known each other for a month, but during that month you have become quite necessary to my happiness. I can't think of the future, somehow, without thinking of you."

He paused. The girl sat on the boulder with face upturned in the moonbeams and seemed scarcely to breathe. He reached out and took her hand.

"Did you ever have an idea, a foreboding, stamp itself upon your brain so clearly and indelibly that it haunted you and gave you no rest?" Reeves spoke in low tones that throbbed with conviction. "Such thoughts of you have been with me for some time, Lady Ann. Because of them I turned my back on a sure thing in Imperial Valley and held to my uncertain prospects with the Forty-Niners. Just for you. When you need a friend I want to be within call."

"Why, what do you mean, Marty?" the girl breathed.

Before he could answer, a footfall sounded behind them.

"Ah, there you are!" drawled a voice. "Lady Ann, your mother is worrying about you, and I have been commissioned to find you and escort you back to camp. Pardon, Reeves, but perhaps you can understand how Mrs. Bobbett felt when she looked around for her daughter and couldn't find her."

Jim Rayner, tall and straight and graceful, stood before Lady Ann and Reeves.

"No danger could come to Miss Bobbett while she was with me," Reeves observed, pointedly.

"Certainly not," agreed Gentleman Jim pleasantly. "If you admire the quiet and the moonshine, Reeves, by all means enjoy them. Come, Lady Ann."

The girl started up from the boulder, took a step toward Gentleman Jim, hesitated a moment and then moved on.

"Good night, Marty," she said.

"Good night," he returned, and watched her fade away in the dim shadows with Jim Rayner.

He remained alone among the boulders for an hour or more, wondering about Jim Rayner and the influence he appeared to hold over the Bobbetts.

Rayner, as Gentleman Jim, played the rôle of a gambler in the Camp. There had been no gambling, of course, and Rayner carried off the part by force of a romantic personality and a little realistic "make believe" with a faro lay-out; but there were times when Reeves had ugly suspicions of what was going on in Rayner's "off" hours, away from the Forty-Niners and at large in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The Tenderfoot drifted back to the camp after a while, and crawled into his blankets under the prairie schooner. Billy Vince, who was bunking near, aroused sleepily.

"That you, Martin?" inquired the piano-player.

"Yes."

"Some thief would make a big haul if he could get away with Robbins's chest of double-eagles," went on Vince. "I just had a dream about that chest."

"The gold is safe enough," said Reeves, settling down. "Robbins and Castle are armed and they'll look out for it."

The ride next day was even more trying than the first stage of the journey had been, but the Forty-Niners were looking forward to Nugget Notch, and bore the discomforts with some show of cheerfulness.

Lady Ann was not riding with the others on horseback. Billy Vince had the girl's mount.

"Miss Bobbett insisted on taking to the 'schooner' with the senorita," Vince explained to Reeves.

The Tenderfoot felt sure that Rayner was concerned, somehow, in Lady Ann's exchange of the saddle for the wagon. Reeves smiled a bit grimly as the thought stuck in his mind.

The grizzly bear gave the Old Piute and Smedders no end of trouble. The heat was scorching, and Hot Tamale's muzzle was a necessary but cruel imposition.

"We ought to have left the brute in Los," grumbled Castle.

"No," demurred Robbins, "as a bit of corroborative detail the bear fits in well with a Western atmosphere. Be easy with him—he's worth all the bother."

To be easy with the grizzly and yet force him to move at all was a difficult proposition. Old Jack was fretted until his habitual stoicism was ruffled and all the swear words he knew tumbled out of him. For some reason, psychological or otherwise, after the Ute's lurid explosion, Hot Tamale became more amiable and made progress.

"Cuss ag'in, Injun!" Smedders would yell whenever the grizzly showed signs of lagging.

There was a dry camp at noon, with all its attendant miseries. The Forty-Niners hunted scraps of shade cast by the wagons, and panted from the heat which floated shimmeringly off the blistered sands.

The ladies kept under the "schooner's" canvas and stirred the scorching air around them with palm-leaf fans. No one was in a mood for talk, and the Chinese and Mexicanos passed around light refreshments and a meagre supply of tepid water drawn from the canteens.

Horses and mules stood disconsolately with their heads down, their dusty sides heaving and their tongues lolling. Only the burro seemed to bear up tolerably well. As for the bear, he pawed and rolled in the hot sand, and grunted and growled and glared his discontent.

After a rest of less than an hour a fresh start was made along the last lap of the journey. Robbins, who had been over the course, was acting as guide.

In order to raise the drooping spirits of the Forty-Niners, he called out the lessening distance from time to time, and somehow he contrived to keep cheerful.

"Ten miles farther, ladies and gentlemen!" Then it was, "Only five miles more, good people! I can see the rim-rock of Nugget Gulch on the sky-line!"

All this helped, in a way. It held a promise of nearing comforts at least, until four o'clock in the afternoon, when the travelers crossed a "rise" and descended into the gulch. A little later Robbins stood up in the democrat wagon and waved his hat.

"Cheer up, everybody!" he shouted; "the old camp is just ahead!"

The weary ones drew themselves erect and showed interest. They were tagging closely, now, on the heels of the Big Idea.

CHAPTER III.

ASSIGNING THE PARTS.

RATTLESNAKE CITY had been reared on a "flat" in a bend of the gulch. Here the defile widened and its walls dropped away in easy slopes. In the heydey of its existence the camp must have been a lively place. Evidences of its departed prosperity had defied the lapse of time, and were still to be seen in the gouged and quarried gravel "benches" of the gulch bottom.

The less durable structures of the town had long since vanished, but the adobe buildings had mocked the passing years and these Robbins had repaired and made habitable. Gaps in the mud walls had been filled with fresh adobe, and other gaps had been closed with windows and doors.

Below the camp, at the trailside, was a rudely painted sign: "No Shootin Aloud in Camp — Leave Guns with the marshall." The painting was fresh, and the rough board that held it was recently from the sawmill and yellow and bristling.

Nailed over adobe doors that faced the short little street were other signs, also painfully new in paint and spelling: "New York Bazzar," "Spread Eagle Hottel & Stage Station," "El Rio Rey Sample Room & Honkatonk," and so on.

The Forty-Niners came to a halt in front of the Spread Eagle Hotel. From the doorway a sandy-haired man was watching the approach of the caravan with quizzical eyes.

"Hello, Mr. Robbins!" he called, moving toward the democrat wagon. "So you've got here with the population, eh? I've had about the lonesomest two weeks I ever put in, but at that I wasn't expecting you for another two weeks anyhow. You certainly had luck in rounding up the people!"

"You're looking pretty good, Agnew,"

said Robbins, getting down from the wagon to shake hands with the sandy-haired man. "How's everything?"

"Same as when you left. I don't believe there has been a soul within fifty miles of this place since you pulled out. Everything's ready. All you've got to do is to open the doors and start the ball a-rolling. Likely bunch you've got together, I must say!" and Agnew again took the measure of the Castle crowd.

Robbins introduced Castle to the sandy-haired man.

"I left Agnew to watch the camp while I went after the inhabitants," he explained. "There wasn't much chance of the place being interfered with, but it was just as well to be on the safe side."

He turned to the Chinamen on the old coach.

"You two boys make for the kitchen of this hotel," he went on. "You'll find everything ready, and see that you give all hands a square meal. Manuel and Pablo will go along and help take care of the crowd.

"Ladies and gentlemen," and here Robbins addressed himself generally to the Forty-Niners, "just go into the hotel and make yourselves comfortable. To-night we will take things easy, and to-morrow I will parcel you out among the different establishments of the camp and start you in your various activities.

"Smedders," he added, "Agnew will show you, Catamount Cal and Bobbett where to leave the wagons and live stock."

Reeves gave up his riding horse to the cowboy and moved toward the covered wagon to assist Miss Bobbett, only to find that Gentleman Jim was ahead of him and his services not required. Side by side with Colonel Hungerford he passed into the hotel.

The "office" was small and its floor was of beaten clay. At one side was a rough board counter, and behind the counter were shelves nailed to the wall. Tin lamps and tallow candles in tin candlesticks covered one of the shelves. On another shelf were cigars in unbroken boxes.

The colonel had run short of smoking material, and, tired though he was, he loudly exulted at sight of the cigar boxes. He had his hand on one when his arm was suddenly caught by Robbins.

"Easy, colonel!" said Robbins; "nothing is to be touched until we get down to a commercial basis to-morrow. All the supplies are inventoried and will be charged up to the man who is put in charge here. If you want to smoke, take one of mine."

Robbins tucked a cigar in the hand of the surprised colonel, and the latter looked at Reeves in heavy astonishment.

"By gad, Reeves!" exclaimed the colonel; "we have bumped right into a business proposition at the start-off. What in blazes is it all about, anyhow?"

"Give it up, colonel," answered Reeves, "but I presume we'll find out all about it to-morrow."

A register lay open on the counter. Robbins closed it and put it on a shelf.

"Supper, lodging and breakfast," said he, "are on the management, but, beginning to-morrow noon, guests will register and pay just as at any other tavern."

"What'll they pay with?" queried Hungerford in consternation.

"Don't worry about that, colonel," answered Robbins reassuringly, "for every one of you Forty-Niners will be liberally grubstaked."

The mystery, instead of slowly clarifying, was getting more and more profound. It bothered Reeves considerably, although he was waiting with patience for the Big Idea to unfold itself.

Ma Bobbett, Lady Ann and the senorita were led away to a room set apart for their exclusive use, while all the men of the party, with the exception of Robbins and Castle, were conducted to a long apartment with tiers of bunks built at the sides.

"We're bein' herded like a lot of cattle," complained Perdue. "I'll bet money we earn all that's comin' to us during the next thirty days. I like to sleep by myself."

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Billy Vince. "You've got a bunk."

"I know, but it's right over Hungerford's. The way he snores is something frightful."

"What do you expect of a mining camp in the sixties?" inquired the colonel. "Hush your grumbling, Perdue, and just be thankful you're not back in Los Angeles, clean broke and on the town."

Outside the door of the sleeping quarters was a long bench with "huck" towels, tin wash basins and a plentiful supply of water. Right here Reeves found the greatest comfort of the day and splashed around in one of the basins to his heart's content.

The sleeping rooms were in two wings at right and left of the main building. Just

back of the office was the dining-room, and here were two tables, covered with white oil-cloth and set with tin dishes. Benches served in lieu of chairs, and the Forty-Niners sat down to a substantial supper.

Following the meal the Nugget Notchers idled around the front of the hotel or walked back and forth exploring the rehabilitated camp. Reeves would have given much for a pleasant hour with Lady Ann, but the girl and her mother kept to their quarters.

Reeves saw, or fancied he saw, a grim but determined expression on the face of Gentleman Jim. It cut the Tenderfoot a little to think that he was indebted to Rayner for the loss of Miss Bobbett's companionship; but, in his own mind, he was sure that this was so.

Then the old question that had plagued Reeves many times recurred to him: What could be the secret of Jim Rayner's influence over the Bobbetts? And to this was now added the collateral question: Why was Rayner exercising that influence to keep him and Lady Ann apart?

Here was another mystery Reeves could not fathom. Rayner, however, could not rear any barrier which Reeves could not level whenever he chose to do so. Of this the Tenderfoot was positive.

While he might yield to circumstances as he found them for the moment, yet he would bide his time until he thought best to adjust the circumstances to suit himself. A big drama and a little one were being staged, there in Nugget Notch.

Robbins and his weird plans were to be borne with, but Reeves was in no way bound to keep hands off the schemes of Gentleman Jim.

Reeves was abroad before any of the others next morning. Finding a place, just around the bend, where Nugget Creek formed a deep and quiet pool, he plunged into the waters and had a short swim. A brisk rub-down followed, and then all the world looked rosy to Reeves.

The moment breakfast was over the surprises began.

Robbins bade farewell to Agnew, who was riding to Penyan, sixty miles away, to catch a train for Denver.

"Here's wishing you luck, Robbins!" Agnew called. "My regards to the judge when he gets here."

"So-long, old man, and take care of yourself!" Robbins answered cheerily. "I'll bank on it that the judge will be pleased."

"Don't see how he can help it."

With that Agnew spurred off along the trail that followed the creek and was soon out of sight.

"The judge!" muttered Colonel Hungerford. "Now who in Sam Hill is the judge, Reeves?"

"That's another point to be cleared up, colonel," said Reeves. "We shall have to wait until Robbins sees fit to take us into his confidence."

The Forty-Niners were collected in front of the hotel. Robbins had summoned them, and had appeared with his box of double-eagles, under which Manuel and Pablo staggered and sweated.

Every one was intensely interested in proceedings, and, when a measure of quiet prevailed, Robbins began.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "we are now about to take down the Book of History, turn back the leaves and open at the romantic page of the past. When we are done with this morning's work, each and every one of you will be fully equipped to play a part that will lend vraisemblance and corroborative detail to a picture of life in the Old West in the days of the Seventies.

"You have agreed not to go out of your characters at any time during the thirty days to come. I don't think you will find this difficult. Already I have cleared the way and, it seems to me, made it easy.

"Here is a hotel, provisioned, equipped and ready for business. Across the way is the 'New York Bazar,' piled with a store of goods and having suitable living quarters in the rear rooms. Down the street is a saloon, gambling hall and honkatonk—equipped, as nearly as circumstances would permit, with the materials and appointments carried by such places in the old times.

"We have to recognize this difference, however: This is a 'dry' State, and in place of the prevalent 'forty-rod' of your ancient mining camp there will be found soft drinks in deceptive bottles that—"

Pop Handy groaned. Colonel Hungerford leaned weakly on Reeves's shoulder and murmured sadly, "Pop! This, sah, is what you might call the last straw."

"But I will not dwell on that part of the business," proceeded Robbins hastily. "Every last thing is inventoried, and the lists are in duplicate. I will begin by presenting every man and woman in the outfit with one hundred dollars in gold."

A ripple of surprise and gratification ran through the ranks of the Forty-Niners.

"This," went on Robbins, "will be entirely apart from, and in addition to, the salaries each of you will receive at the month's end. The money is a gratuity, and the reason for giving it will be explained later. Kindly form in line."

Golshaw marshaled the crowd in a single rank. As each person passed in front of Robbins, the latter handed out five twenty-dollar gold pieces and had them receipted for. The first man to get the "gratuity" was Gordon Castle, and the last was Old Jack, the Ute.

Jack drew a cross at the bottom of his receipt and went away biting the coins to make sure they were genuine.

Reeves, his own gold clinking in his pocket, was growing more and more bewildered. The baffling nature of the mystery increased with every move of the prodigal Robbins.

"Now," proceeded the latter, after the gold had been parceled out, "you have had many pledges of my good faith, and this last one ought to be more than sufficient. I have backed it with a free outlay of two thousand dollars. Next, I will give my selections for the various business activities of the camp."

At this point he took a memorandum book from his pocket and consulted it from time to time.

"Colonel Chet Hungerford will be landlord of the Spread Eagle Hotel. He will check off the various articles on his inventory and sign the lists in duplicate. Then, from the time he begins business, he will keep an accurate account of all he receives and disburses.

"If the hotel shows a profit, he will receive twenty-five per cent of the same; if a loss, he must make it good to the extent of twenty-five per cent. Ah Sin, at such wages as he and the colonel may agree upon, will be the cook. Manuel and Pablo will wait at table and make themselves generally useful, and, as with Ah Sin, their wages will lie between them and the colonel. These wages, let it be understood, to be in addition to the sums to be paid each member of the Forty-Nine Camp, as such."

"By gad!" whispered Hungerford hoarsely, wiping his moist brows on a bandanna. "Can you beat this?"

"The Bobbetts will conduct the Bazar," proceeded Robbins, unmoved, "in the same manner Hungerford looks after the hotel—a fair division of profits, if there are any, or of losses if they prove poor managers. With every article listed on the Bazar inventory the Bobbetts will find the cost price, laid down in the Notch."

"My sakes, Ezra," palpitated Ma Bobbett, "I always wanted you to keep a store."

"And here's the chance," struck in Gentleman Jim, with glimmering eyes on Ezra.

"Ma and I can do the sellin', all right," said Ezra, "but Lady Ann'll have to keep the books."

"James Rayner, Billy Vince and Pop Handy will begin business at El Rio Rey," continued Robbins. "Gentleman Jim to look after the gambling tables, Vince to play the piano and Handy to be behind the bar."

"Gambling is barred in this State, too," spoke up Gentleman Jim. "Swell chance I have to show a profit."

"You haven't much on me, at that," said Vince. "Play piano—and pass the hat in a crowd of make-believe old-timers! Oh, well," he added, and jingled his pocket, "I can hang onto my hundred bones. It ain't so worse."

"Jest think o' me as a purveyor of ginger sody and root beer!" wailed Pop Handy, and almost wept.

"The Garcias," proceeded Robbins, "will live in the adobe next to the Bazar. They can eat there, or board at the hotel."

"We'll board," averred the señorita decisively. *"Madre mia,"* and she looked at her soft brown hands, " cooking is not my line, but to dance!" and she tripped lightly the measure of a bolero, swinging a beaded bag in which rattled her own gratuity.

"Ree Middling has a shack up the gulch," continued Robbins, "and will live there and mine for gold."

"In played-out placerings!" commented Middling. "But this sure was a noble place for workin' a cradle or gold-pan, once on a time!" and his eyes roved fondly up and down the gulch.

"Lafe Smedders runs the corral and looks to the live stock," announced Robbins. "Martin Reeves has a roving commission as a Tenderfoot, and the rest of you will kindly see that he encounters the usual tenderfoot's troubles."

"We'll look out for that," said Rayner, and leveled a glance at Reeves that indicated humor—and something else not at all pleasant.

"Perdue will camp with Middling, and give us the Western b-a-a-d man with all the thrills."

"No chance for me to pick up any extra change," mourned Perdue.

"Hold up the stage," suggested Billy Vince.

"Catamount Cal will drive the stage," said Robbins, "and when he doesn't drive to Penyan he'll make the trip to Rocky Spur.

"Old Jack Lightning-that-Strikes will find a neat little dug-out below town, just where the trail crosses the creek," continued Robbins. "That's where he will stay with the bear. Now I guess—"

"Just a second, Robbins," interrupted Rayner. "You haven't said a word about the slickest little house in camp—the adobe at the end of the street with chintz curtains at the windows. I looked in this morning, and the furniture is the real thing. Don't you think a right classy gambler ought to have that place for a home? I'm referring to myself, of course."

"Did you read the sign on the door, Rayner?" asked Robbins.

"Certainly. 'Reserved for the Judge.' But who's the judge?"

"Never mind. Sing Lee is to go up there, open the house and have it ready against the judge's arrival."

"I'm quite a hand for company myself," said Gentleman Jim, with a wide smile, "and maybe this judge would feel in the same way."

"A gambler and a judge would make a fine pair of bunkies," laughed Billy Vince.

"I'm sorry, Rayner," went on Robbins firmly, "but that house is reserved. Now, ladies and gentlemen," and Robbins turned to address his remarks to all the Forty-Niners, "we are a compact little community and each of you has a grub-stake to work with. Try to make your hundred dollars grow by getting as much of the other fellow's stake as you can. That will mean real activity and inspire a brisk spirit of emulation.

"Three prizes are hung up, five hundred dollars, three hundred dollars and two hundred dollars. To the man or woman who can make his or her grub-stake grow the largest, the first prize will be given at the end of the month; and to the next person who accumulates the second largest amount, the second prize will be given; and the third prize to the third in line.

"But there must be no underhand manipulations—we are all ladies and gentlemen, remember—and Golshaw as town marshal, will draft a code of laws and look after the peace of Nugget Notch. Castle will be your mayor."

"What are you to be, Robbins?" asked Pop Handy.

"I'm just the business manager and disburser of funds," answered Robbins, with a laugh. "Now get your inventories, all of you, and begin to check up. We—"

He was interrupted by a wild yell from Old Jack, the Ute. He had left Hot Tamale fastened to a post by the horse corral and, in some manner, the bear had slipped his chain. The grizzly, unmuzzled, was now charging the crowd, lumbering into sight around the corner of the hotel.

The women screamed and ran into the hotel. All the men scattered, save the Indian, who grabbed a *riata* from Lafe Smedders and warily went forth to meet Hot Tamale.

Rayner, in his haste to reach safety, stumbled over Robbins's chest of gold. He fell, picked himself up hurriedly, and ran toward the Bazar.

"You dropped this when you stumbled, Rayner," said Reeves, following Gentleman Jim into the store.

The object the Tenderfoot held out to Rayner was a chain, a very peculiar chain made of small nuggets linked together. Gentleman Jim, muttering angrily, snatched the chain from Reeves and turned away.

The Tenderfoot wondered at Rayner's testiness. And he remembered those linked nuggets later, at a time when the remembrance spelled evil things for the gambler.

CHAPTER IV.

A BOMB UNDER A HIGH HAT.

HOT TAMALE had been trained to dance, to wrestle and box, to do tricks with a stick and to drink sugar-water out of a bottle; but he had a sour and unreliable disposition and was never even reasonably safe unless wearing his muzzle. Already this had been demonstrated to the Forty-Niners more than once, when casualties had been avoided only by a quick scampering to places of refuge.

Profiting by experience, the members of the Camp, there in Nugget Notch, had lost no time in getting behind closed doors. It

was Old Jack's business to take care of the bear, and the work was left to him entirely.

With ease and quickness the Ute lassoed the lumbering brute, then jumped over him and danced around him while embroidering his shaggy legs and body with coil upon coil of the stout *riata*. At last the grunting and snarling animal was helpless on his back, and the Indian rushed away for the chain and muzzle. When these were in place Hot Tamale was freed of the rope and sulkily followed his master back to the corral.

Martin Reeves's "roving commission" landed him, for the time being, in the hotel as clerk for Hungerford.

"Bear a hand here, Marty," said the colonel, "and call off while I check."

"How much am I worth, colonel?" inquired Reeves, with a smile.

"Oh, bother that! This is nothing more than a little friendly accommodation."

"Will you give me board and lodging as a 'friendly accommodation?' "

"Now, suh, you are hitting me on my business side. Board and lodging come at twenty-five dollars a week."

"All right. I'll help you for a dollar an hour and you can apply it on my first week's bill."

"Have it your way, then, and peel off your coat."

By noon the preliminary work was finished, and the colonel was smoking a fat cigar behind the counter and waiting for custom. It came with a rush when Pablo went out in front and clanged the triangle for dinner.

Those who signed the register as steady boarders and lodgers were Don Quesada, Vince, Catamount Cal, Rayner, Handy, Smedders and Reeves. Those who signed for meals only were the señorita, Robbins, Castle and Golshaw.

When Reeves came out into the office after dinner he found the colonel figuring and chuckling.

"If anybody asks you who gets the big prize at the end of the month, Reeves," said he, "just tell 'em you know. With seven boarders and lodgers at twenty-five a week and three boarders at fifteen a week, the Spread Eagle starts off with two hundred and twenty in yellow boys plugging into the till every seven days. Some income, what?"

"Catamount Cal won't be here all the time, colonel," returned Reeves. "You can't count him as one of the steadies."

"That's so," agreed the colonel, revising his figures.

"Then think of the prices you'll have to pay at the Bazar for the stuff you put on the table."

"If the Bobbetts try to rob me," bristled Hungerford, "I'll buy all my stuff in Penyan."

"Wait till you've run the hotel a while before you decide who's to get the first prize," Reeves suggested.

That afternoon the Tenderfoot strolled over to the Bazar. Middling and Perdue were just leaving with two bags of supplies and Lady Ann was posting the charges on the books.

She was alone in the little storeroom when Reeves entered, and she smiled a bit uncertainly as her eyes met his.

"Why can't you and I have any more walks and talks, Lady Ann?" Reeves asked. "You have been avoiding me lately."

Ezra Bobbett was out in the backyard splitting wood, and Ma Bobbett was inspecting her culinary department. Lady Ann flushed and paled; then, after a moment's hesitation, she shut the door leading into the rear rooms and leaned across the scrap of counter toward Reeves.

"Marty," she murmured, "after what you said to me out in the moonlight, when we camped on the way here, it—it wouldn't be fair to you."

Reeves looked into the pretty brown face with its sensitively twitching lips, at the soft brown hair brushed smoothly back from the high forehead, and deep into the wide, hazel eyes that mirrored a spirit capable of self-sacrifice in a dauntless way.

"I don't understand you, *mujercita*," said he slowly. "You are becoming as mysterious as every one and everything else in this old camp. Will you explain what you mean, Lady Ann? Just what wouldn't be fair to me?"

"Marty, dear," went on the girl, "you have fine people back East. What would they think if—if—"

"There, now," put in Reeves, with a smile, "my people are splendid people, and sensible people. They know that I am twenty-three and able to pick and choose for myself."

He reached out to take her hand, but she drew away from him.

"Listen," she went on, her voice thin and hard and seemingly twisted out of her very soul, "I was a nameless foundling, Marty,

until Ma Bobbett and Ezra gave me a home and called me Liddy Ann! Oh, I had to tell you, I had to!"

And she turned from him with tears in her eyes. He leaned over the counter and, almost roughly, drew her about until she faced him again.

"The Bobbetts are not your parents?" he demanded.

"No."

"I understand, then, why you are so different. That has puzzled me for some time. What do you know about yourself, Lady Ann?"

"Nothing at all, Marty."

He laughed softly.

"And you can think that makes a particle of difference?" he asked. "Why, to me the dearest girl in the world has brown hair and hazel eyes and a sweetness and charm all her own. She used to ride in the old stage coach when it was held up by Perdue, and now she's clerking at the Bazar in Nugget Notch. She isn't a Bobbett, and her name isn't Liddy Ann, but she is Lady to me, and has been and will be to the end of time. Remember that always."

Thereupon he took her face in his hands and kissed her quivering lips and looked straight into her startled eyes.

"Very pretty," drawled a voice from the door, "but I don't think bazars dealt in that sort of thing in the sixties and seventies. Anyhow, this one won't, while I'm around. Reeves, you had better take a tumble to yourself."

The Tenderfoot whirled to confront Jim Rayner.

"What business is this of yours?" he flung at the gambler hotly.

"If you can't guess, my son, then you'll never know. Come in here and buy what you want; then, when you have paid for it, take a slant for out-of-doors. I don't believe you're so thick."

The velvet softness of Rayner's blue eyes had changed into polished flint.

"You get me, all right," he added, "so enough said."

With that he walked on to the counter.

Reeves's temper was on edge and it was with difficulty that he restrained himself.

"Neither you, nor your friend the don, is going to interfere with me," he said, his voice low but seething with determination. "I'll look out for Miss Bobbett, Rayner, and before any of your schemes can reach her they will first have to pass Martin Reeves."

Gentleman Jim paid no attention.

"Let me look at your pipes, Lady Ann," said he. "Billy Vince knocked my meerschaum off a table at the Rio Rey. Something in a good briar, if you have it."

The girl's face was pallid. She cast an appealing glance at Reeves; and, obedient to the mute request, he quietly turned and left the store. Just outside, sitting on a bench, smoking a cigarette and leaning carelessly against the mud wall, he saw Don Quesada.

The don it was who lent color and dash to Castle's '49 Camp. He was the rider, the swaggerer; graceful in movement as a leopard, he was endowed also with the slinking qualities of that four-footed hunter of prey; but he was a silent man, spectacular in action but never in speech.

His hat was a bell-crowned affair, richly embroidered with gold cord and having jingling coins hung to its brim. For coat he wore a short red velvet jacket, gay with polished silver buttons. His trousers, tight to the knee, flared wide at the bottoms, slashed at the outer seams and laced with gold braid. A crimson sash girdled his waist.

Don Quesada was young and delicately featured as a woman. He was as handsome as a man may be, and he could ride like a centaur and dance beautifully with the señorita. Yet it was evident that there was a mixed strain in him and that he was not wholly Spanish.

Reeves and the don had been ordered by Castle to keep away from each other. In Los Angeles the Tenderfoot had bumped the don's head against the stockade wall of the Camp, wrested a dirk from his slim fingers and then bumped his head again—all because he had annoyed Lady Ann.

After that, Reeves had warned Don Quesada, and the don had breathed dark threats in choice Castilian; all of which impelled Castle to show his authority.

Reeves halted in the road and gave the don a sharp sizing up. The don puffed a wisp of white smoke into the air and looked through it mockingly. Reeves whirled on his heel and crossed the street to the hotel.

He and Rayner, he thought as he took a chair in the shade, knew where they stood now. They were against each other because of Lady Ann. That was the surface reason, but the real cause underlying the difference was obscure.

Reeves had now two avowed enemies in

the Notch, the don and the gambler. Their enmity worried him less, however, than the weird conviction that misfortune, in some way, threatened the girl.

"I've figured it out, Reeves, and I reckon the Spread Eagle is bound to make a right good showing."

The Tenderfoot looked around to see the colonel, in his shirt sleeves bulking large in the open doorway.

"Glad of it, colonel," said he.

"Catamount Cal got away for Rocky Spur with the coach and the mules right after dinner. He's gone for this person called the judge. Who do you allow that judge is?"

Reeves shook his head.

"Nugget Notch is full of conundrums, colonel," he answered.

"I hate a mystery, and this pesters me a heap. Cal swears he'll be at that water-hole before midnight, and be waiting at the Spur for the Limited to-morrow afternoon at two o'clock. 'How'll I know this judge when he gets off the train?' he says to Robbins. 'You'll know him quick enough,' says Robbins, and laughs in that knowing way of his.

"'And, anyhow,' Robbins goes on, 'I guess there won't be such a lot of people drop off the Limited at the Spur that you'll be puzzled so blamed much.' By day after to-morrow the judge will be with us, and I reckon we can find out who he is for ourselves. Ho, hum!" the colonel yawned. "Come on in and let's have a hand at cribbage."

The new inhabitants of Nugget Notch settled into their various activities in a way that would have aroused the admiration of the old timers. Things were moving smoothly, and it would have taken an experienced eye to detect the spurious character of the players in the Old Western drama.

It was a counterfeit life, with realism injected into it by twenty grub-stakes and three prizes hung up as rewards for shrewdness and industry. Robbins, everybody agreed, was as sharp as they made 'em; and it was further agreed that some amazingly fine scheme was back of his Big Idea.

On the day after Catamount Cal had departed for Rocky Spur, Reeves dropped in at the marshal's headquarters for a chat with anybody who might have leisure. Castle was dozing on a cot, Golshaw was busy drafting his code for the peace and order of the town, and Robbins, with a marking pot, was manufacturing signs and singing softly as he worked.

The signs were being painted on boards, about a foot wide and two feet long.

"How are the boys using you, Tenderfoot?" inquired Robbins.

"They haven't peppered my feet with bullets yet in order to make me dance," Reeves answered cheerfully.

"Don't be discouraged. I guess they'll do something to make you earn your salary before long."

Robbins carefully finished that particular sign and stood it along the wall with others to dry. Reeves read the lettering curiously.

> He had Sand in his Craw
> But was slow in the Draw,
> So we planted him out in the dew.

"How does it look to you, Reeves?" inquired Robbins, glowing pridefully over his work.

"All right," answered Reeves, "but what are the signs for?"

"Look at the next one there," went on Robbins. "I consider that a regular gem in the way of an epitaph."

The next one ran thus: "Too Fresh—Colt's '44."

"It's pretty brief," said Reeves.

"But witty, eh? Brevity, you know, is the soul of wit. There's another, and I had to work some to get it all on."

> "He had a deck of playing cards
> All battered on their faces,
> With kings and queens in duplicate
> And thirteen extra aces."

"Is Nugget Notch geting ready to lose a few of its inhabitants?" queried Reeves.

"I hope not. It just occurred to me that Rattlesnake City's 'Boot Hill' hasn't been properly played up. It's back of town, and was set apart for the early ones who passed out with their boots on. Not a marker in the whole place, and it's hard to find a place for one. I'm just going to set these signs around haphazard, to-morrow morning, so the judge, when he goes up there, will feel more at home.

"Who is this judge, anyhow?"

Robbins winked.

"Don't ask me, Reeves," he answered. "The judge is the judge, and will have to reveal himself."

The whole camp was wondering about the judge, and early next afternoon every one was watching for the first sign of the returning stage. The excitement grew as the hours dragged, and Colonel Hungerford was in such a blaze of wonder and curiosity that he could hardly contain himself.

It was four o'clock before the "Yip-yip!" of Catamount Cal was heard down the gulch. The old coach rolled into sight with the dusty mules at a gallop.

Robbins gave the crowd in front of the Spread Eagle Hotel a final appraising scrutiny.

"Colonel, get into that old black coat," he ordered. "You're all watching the bear dance, mind. Jack, start the brute. Vince, go back to the Rio Rey and pound the piano hard and sing at the top of your voice —'Buffalo Gals' is the number. Golshaw, you're to have a fuss with Perdue. Got your gun, Perdue?"

"Sure," said the bad man.

"No loads in it?"

"Nary a load."

"Good! Now everybody appear easy and pretend the best you know how. This is an old time mining camp, remember, and the stage rolls in twice a week. Steady all!"

The old coach lurched and swayed and the steaming mules slid to a halt in front of the stage station, a steamer trunk and a suitcase lashed in the boot.

"All out!" yelled Catamount Cal, from the box. "This here's Nugget Notch *and* the last stop. Snakes, but I'm dry. Ary man here got anythin' in his hip-pocket?"

No man had, of course, for the Notch was dryer than Cal himself. Besides, everybody was too busy watching for the judge to think of any one or anything else.

A dead silence reigned, and Hot Tamale sat down and began pawing flies while the Ute craned his neck to watch the stage. Then, from El Rio Rey, came this:

"Oh, the Buffalo gals are a comin' out to-night,
Comin' out to-night, comin' out to-night,
Oh, the Buffalo gals are a comin' out to-night,
To dance by the light of the moon!"

The coach door was pushed open, while Pablo and Manuel ran around behind and began removing the luggage. A high hat appeared, followed by a man in a frock coat and carrying a gold-headed cane.

The crowd in front of the hotel began to breathe hard. So this quiet, inoffensive old gentleman was the judge!

"Hist, you Jack!" Robbins whispered hoarsely. "The bear, man! He's scaring the mules!"

The Ute turned to find the bear on his hind legs hop-jumping toward the stage. One jump and Jack had the bear, but not until the mules also had jumped and slid around the corner of the hotel on their way to the corral.

"Whoa, ye varmints!" howled Catamount Cal, his hat flying off and his long hair whipping in the wind of his flight. "Whoa—whoa—" And then the words died out and mules and coach and driver vanished.

Pablo lay on his back with the steamer trunk across his chest. Manuel was standing on his head on the suitcase. In ordinary circumstances there would have been a laugh, but the tremendous importance of the judge's arrival stemmed the tide of merriment.

The judge had stepped out of the coach just in time to prevent himself from being thrown heels over head. He had a kind and pleasant face, with bushy eyebrows over deep-set eyes.

He stared about him, and waved aside Robbins, who was hastening forward with outstretched hand.

"So this is the dear old camp," murmured the judge, "the camp I knew in my young manhood."

His voice, rich and pleasing, fondled the words.

"The gulch," he went on, switching his gaze up and down the defile, "is the same old gulch! The sky is as blue, the rippling waters as muddy, and the benches as broken and battered as in the beautiful old days! Well, and so I come back!"

With cane under his arm and hands behind him he walked up and down the road in front of the hotel and the wondering, gasping crowd of Forty-Niners.

Three times he paced a brief course on the sand. He seemed to be expecting something and to feel disappointed. Suddenly he paused in front of the bystanders, whirled around and his gentle, docile manner underwent a complete change.

He threw the gold-headed cane at the bear, and the bear grabbed it from sheer force of habit and began to juggle with it. Then, without any preamble in the way of words, the judge's two hands leaped under

the long coat to his hips and came away with a pair of derringers.

"Oh, you measly, blockheaded crowd of fake Westerners!" he roared. "Have I got to put up with this? There's every blamed thing in the old camp but action! Do something! By the jumping horned-toads, do something quick or I'll cut loose!"

No one had dreamed—unless it was Robbins—that such a bomb had been brought into camp under that eminently respectable high hat. Now the bomb had exploded, and the Forty-Niners proceeded to do something.

Colonel Chet Hungerford led the activity, and was first to get behind the protecting walls of the hotel.

"Go it, judge!" yelled the delighted Billy Vince from the doorway of the honkatonk; "wake 'em up! Give 'em fits!"

"Come back here!" shouted the judge. "Since when have the old timers gone gun-shy! Come back here, you crawling false-alarms! How long would a stove-pipe hat and a boiled shirt last in a regular mining camp? And here you put up with me in all the fuss and frills of the effete East! Is this your idea of the right thing?"

Then, knocking off his high hat with the muzzle of one of the revolvers, he kicked it at the bear and wearily put away the derringers.

"Maybe this is the best you could do, Robbins," he said sadly, "but I'm disappointed. Take me to the place where I'm to stay. What I want is less ceremony and more spirit. I thought you understood that."

Robbins, vastly chagrined, pushed his arm through that of the old gentleman and led him away in the direction of the house reserved for his use and comfort.

As the two got out of sight, Old Jack Lightning-that-Strikes grunted, made a few forcible remarks in Ute, and appropriated the gold-headed cane. He tried to get the hat, but the bear had crushed it in both paws and refused to give it up.

While the two fought for the bit of demoralized headgear, the Forty-Niners slowly recovered from their overwhelming surprise.

"So that's the judge!" wheezed Hungerford, dazedly. "By gad, but he changed mighty sudden from a nice, respectable old gentleman into a fire-eater! He even had Robbins going! Well, well! I wonder what'll happen now? Pablo, you and Manuel tote the trunk and the grip right along after the judge. If he wants them, and doesn't have them, like enough he'll start another rough-house. One spell of that kind will do *me!*"

The bewildered Forty-Niners, conscious that they had somehow failed Robbins in a crisis, went their several ways gloomily. Old Jack, the Ute, seemed to be the happiest man in the camp. With the half-ruined hat pulled down over his ropy hair, and with the cane in one hand, he started proudly for his dug-out, leading the bear.

CHAPTER V.

LINKED NUGGETS.

REEVES had been an amused witness of the incidents attending the arrival of the judge in Nugget Notch. As a close listener and observer, he was now able to hazard a few guesses concerning the newcomer.

"He was acquainted with Rattlesnake City in its early days, Smedders," said Reeves to the cowboy, who arrived in front of the hotel after helping Catamount Cal put away the mules, "and he is either a partner of Robbins in this move to put the old camp again on the map, or else Robbins is merely his agent and looking after the work for him."

"But whyever was the ole camp woke up at all?" queried Smedders. "What's your notion of the ole boy's game in carryin' out sech a plumb foolish proposition? D'you reckon he's locoed? He sure acted that-away."

"Whatever else he may be, Smedders," declared Reeves positively, "it's a cinch the judge is not locoed."

"Anyway, he's purty well along in years."

"Sixty-five, I should say."

"He'd have to be all o' that to *sabe* much about Rattlesnake City in the days when it was right lively. But nimble—wow! Honest, I never knowed a man o' his years to be so smart. From 'way East, d'you reckon?"

"Possibly."

"What-all was he disapp'inted about? He wrecked the high cady and threw away his walkin' stick, and then moseyed off with Robbins like he'd lost his last friend. Amazin', I call it. Can't be he wanted the Notchers to hector him, or cut up rough!

Yet he jumped us some fierce for not destroyin' the plug hat, and fin'ly he up and destroys it himself. I wouldn't 'a' believed it if I hadn't 'a' seen it.

"We couldn't be expected to take sich liberties with a friend o' Robbins's, and him a jedge. 'Course, if the jedge was one o' Castle's crowd, and playin' the game with us here, we might have—"

Bang, bang, bang! Smedders was interrupted by a barking revolver and a patter of hoofs up the road. Jumping from the bench, the cowboy and the Tenderfoot threw startled glances in the direction whence the sounds came.

"Oh," grunted Smedders, dropping back on his seat, "it's only Perdue earnin' his salary."

The little disturber was racing along between the adobes, a revolver in each hand and his horse at a run. He fired in the air as he came, and presently he began to yell. The noise he made was out of all proportion to his size, and he sounded a lot more formidable than he looked.

"I seen Robbins give him blanks for his guns," commented Smedders, "and heerd him tell Perdue when he was to pull this off. Wonder if it'll seem real to the jedge?"

"Don't sit there, Smedders!" said Reeves. "We've got to potter around and appear excited; if we don't, we won't be earning our own salaries. I'll run across the street while you make a bluff at trying to stop Perdue."

"Aw, shucks!" grunted Smedders, who was just ready to smoke and take his comfort.

"Youpi, yi, yi!" howled the charging "bad" man. "I'm the hootin', totin' ole Bengal tager from the wilds o' Bad Ax County! I'm the coiled-up sidewinder, soundin' my rattles an' gittin' ready ter strike! I'm the roarin', ring-tailed twister from the windy hills, and when I happen along folks has got ter take ter their cyclone cellars or be blowed from the face o' the y'arth. D'ye hear me comin'? Scatter, ever'body, scatter!"

Reeves pawed at the front door of the Bazar, but found it locked. Ma Bobbett, who always took her part well, screamed wildly. Crowding against the mud wall of the store, Reeves turned and watched the Forty-Niners running to cover.

Smedders came into the road, waving his hands and shouting. The trouble-maker nearly ran him down. Whirling his horse, Perdue made another try at Smedders, and the latter rushed for the hotel.

Bang, bang! The blank cartridges exploded with noise and fury.

"I'm the ole Bad Ax River an' I'm swellin' my banks!" bawled Perdue, in his best style; "I'm a ragin' wolf from the wilderness an' gittin' ready to devour! Hunt yer holes, you other varmints, an' le'me be! Whoop-ya!"

By that time Perdue was back in front of El Rio Rey. There he dropped out of his saddle, slipped a fresh supply of "blanks" into his guns and bolted through the honkatonk door.

Gentleman Jim fell through a window, while Pop Handy and Billy Vince came wildly out at the rear of the building. *Crash! crash!* Some empty bottles, carefully placed, were smashed on the saloon floor.

"Help!" cried Pop Handy dismally, tottering around in the street and looking for shelter.

Billy Vince ran toward the marshal's office. "Golshaw! Golshaw!" he whooped at every bound.

A terrific racket came from within El Rio Rey. Although carefully made, it was a very realistic racket, and seemed to indicate that Perdue was wrecking the entire establishment.

Two forms emerged from the judge's quarters. One wore cowhide boots, corduroy trousers and flannel shirt. Could that be the judge? It seemed impossible, and yet one look at the glittering eyes under the bushy brows convinced Reeves that the man was really the judge in his Old Western clothes.

Robbins was trying to hold him back, and Gentleman Jim and Pop Handy were lending their own frantic persuasions, but all without effect. The judge rushed for El Rio Rey.

"I'm the crack o' doom!" came in furious tones from inside the honkatonk; "I'm the Ole Bad Ax volcaner an' about to erupt! Hear me rumble!"

Just then the judge threw himself through the door and the noise was redoubled in volume. From every direction Forty-Niners began rushing to the scene. Castle was running at top speed and Golshaw was close behind him.

"Why didn't you keep the judge out of this, Robbins?" panted Castle.

"He's harder to manage than Old Jack's

grizzly," answered Robbins. "I couldn't hold him back."

"What'll happen in there?"

"He'll just call Perdue's bluff, that's all," chuckled Jim Rayner. "Listen!"

The crashing had suddenly ceased, and the hiatus was filled in with the voice of the judge.

"This is the first time I've come company front with a bad man in thirty years," shouted the judge, "and it was too good a chance to let slip. Down on your knees, you! More than one of your kind has started to stampede and I've got him milling! I've barreled up as many as a dozen earthquakes of your kind!"

Then, Perdue, waveringly: "Don't shoot, jedge! For heaven's sake, don't shoot!"

"Come on, now! Keep on your knees, but come on!"

Then, through the door of El Rio Rey, walked the fiery old judge. Perdue was shuffling along on his knees and his captor had him by the ear.

"Has he killed anybody or done any damage in the camp?" inquired the judge.

"No, judge," answered Golshaw, "you plugged his game before he had time."

"Then you fork your broncho and climb for the timber!" said the judge to Perdue, and helped the terrified little man toward his horse with a shove.

Another moment and the Bad Man from Bad Ax had faded out of town. The judge turned to Robbins reproachfully.

"I asked you particularly, Amos," said he, "to round up the worst cases you could find. And here's what you give me! Well, let's go to the hotel and eat."

The Forty-Niners were all trying to keep straight faces, for it seemed plain that the judge considered the Perdue incident anything but a performance staged for his particular benefit. But there was many a quiet laugh, that evening, over the undoing of little Perdue.

Reeves, in his guessing, found himself again at sea. How could the judge have Robbins for a partner, or an agent, in that queer enterprise at the Notch and yet not be thoroughly familiar with all the details? From certain remarks which the judge let fall it appeared certain that Robbins was representing him in some capacity, but just what the two had in common was hard to discover.

At the Spread Eagle Hotel the judge was introduced to Reeves and to others as Judge Rufus Brand, from New York State. Reeves had opportunity, in the hotel office and at supper, to appraise Brand more carefully than he had yet done.

The judge was one of those who would carry their years lightly. He was straight as a pine, hale and hearty, a man of education and necessarily of refinement. When he talked his language was well chosen, although he seemed to make an effort at being colloquial in a Western fashion. The result of this, now and then, was bizarre.

"You are running an A One tavern, colonel," said he, as he passed over a dollar for his meal. "How do you find business?"

"Fair," was the answer, "considering the limited population of the camp."

"You charge like a pirate, anyhow. After this I'm going to board at home. Anything doing in the camp to-night, Amos?" he asked, turning to Robbins.

"Sort of a *baile* at the honkatonk, judge," replied Robbins. "Only three ladies in camp, you know, so partners are scarce."

"We'll drop in and sample the fun," said the judge. "First real enjoyment I've had was clipping the spurs of that *hombre* who was shooting up the town."

"Well, I must say you did it handily."

"Had any gun fights lately?"

"No, no gun fights. We've a pretty good marshal, judge, and he holds the boys down."

A flicker, it may have been of dissappointment, ran over the judge's face.

"Anyhow, this is the life, eh?" he said with some enthusiasm as his brow cleared. "I hunted all over the West for a year to find some remains of the old times, but there aren't any remains. What's left has been planted, and a New West that's hardly different from the East has grown up on the plains and in the mountains.

"Where the mule-whacker lambasted his four and six mule teams, we now find an iron trail, and where the pack-burros scaled the high trails we now have paved roads and automobiles. It has remained for you, my boy, to corral a few fragments of bygone days and dump them down in what was left of Rattlesnake City.

"The fragments are half-hearted survivors of Spartan forbears, but I'll try not to be too critical. Amos, you did your best, and we'll have to get along with what we have. Let's stroll around and smoke."

Judge Brand and Robbins left the hotel,

and Colonel Hungerford stared at Smedders and Reeves.

"If I'm a half-hearted fragment, gentlemen," said the colonel, "I'd like mighty well to be told what a whole Westerner looks like."

"I hold to be quite a sizable fragment myself," added Smeddars. "I don't know what-all this judge is trying to come at."

"I reckon he wouldn't feel so top-lofty if some one tipped him off that the Perdue business was a joke," growled the colonel. "I allow I'll leave Manuel to watch the office while I take in that *baile* at the Rio Rey. More than likely, something is due to happen."

By nine o'clock that evening nearly all the Forty-Niners had gathered within the hospitable walls of the honkatonk. Billy Vince was pounding the piano and Lady Ann was singing. Gentleman Jim was dealing faro, and the white chips, the reds and the blues were heaped around the table-edge. Over at the bar, Pop Handy was so busy he had to call on Sing Lee for help.

Judge Brand and Robbins strolled in at the moment when the singing stopped and the señorita, splendid in her Mexicana costume, whirled out on the floor to the tempo of clicking castanets.

Vince, a cigarette drooping between his lips, gave more attention to his playing. A dreamy, Spanish theme floated softly from beneath his fingers, and the graceful señorita melted into the strains and became a part of the swaying melody.

Gradually the soft air swelled into fire and passion, and the languor of the dancer yielded to a swifter and more tempestuous call of the bounding notes.

Reeves had seen the señorita at her specialty dozens of times, but never had she appeared to him so marvelously the queen of the dance. For the benefit of Judge Brand she was fairly excelling herself.

Gliding toward the splendidly costumed Quesada, she smiled, allured and drew him out upon the floor. Then the two advanced, retreated and went through all the different measures.

But the don was not himself. While he danced with the señorita, his glances were all for Lady Ann. He bungled, he slipped and almost overturned Ma Bobbett where she sat in her chair.

This exhibition aroused the señorita's temper. Whirling in contempt from the gaily bedecked don, she danced around the circle of onlookers. Her bright eyes roved from face to face and she half-approached Reeves. The Tenderfoot smiled as the Mexicana swept past him, and then he chuckled as she made the judge her object of attack.

The onlookers considered this a mere compliment to the honored guest of the camp; but, to the surprise of all, the judge took it more seriously. While Don Quesada stood apart, stunned at being so ignored, the old gentleman galloped forward in his cowhide boots and pulled away the bandanna that was knotted at his throat.

"Whoo-ee!" he yelled, and whirled away in the swirling mazes of the dance.

The judge was no amateur at that sort of thing. This fact was quickly made evident to all. With a grace and vigor which many a younger man might have envied he moved back and forth in perfect time with the music and his heavy shod feet dropped lightly on the rough boards of the floor.

"Bravo!" yelled Pop Handy, clapping his hands. "Ain't ary man here can shake his foot with the jedge!"

The applause went round, and everybody took part in it save Don Quesada. He knew that he had made a miserable spectacle of himself, and the red of humiliation crept into his face and an angry gleam shone in his eyes.

That Judge Brand was thoroughly enjoying himself was proved by the gleeful whoops to which he gave vent at frequent intervals. No cavalier could have been more attentive to the señorita than he. Finally the two were dancing with the girl holding to one corner of the bandanna; and then, at the end, when the music crashed to a close, the judge dropped with a flourish and the señorita sat on his lifted knee.

This tableau completed the dance. Amid the cheering and hand-clapping that followed, the old gentleman, a bit breathless from his efforts, led the Mexicana to a seat and placed her in it with a courtly bow.

"He can clean up on the camp bad man an' he can outshine the don himself on a dancin' floor," murmured Lafe Smedders; "what-all can't he do, I wonder?"

As Brand straightened himself after making his devoirs to the señorita, his eyes fell upon Lady Ann, who sat near. He stared at something which encircled Lady

Ann's white and shapely throat. His gaze, riveted to the object, pulled him forward.

Reaching out, he took the neck-chain in a trembling hand and continued to peer at it.

Ann Bobbett's eyes were wide and startled. So were Reeves's, for the chain was the nugget chain which he had found and restored to Gentleman Jim. How came those linked nuggets in Lady Ann's possession? was the thought that ran through the Tenderfoot's mind.

"Pardon me, Miss Bobbett," said the judge, "but may I look at the chain for a moment?"

Mutely she lifted it over her shimmering brown tresses and passed it over to him. There was deep silence in the room while he carried the linked nuggets nearer a light and examined them carefully.

Finally he turned to the girl again, his voice husky with emotion.

"Will you tell me, please," he asked, "where you got this chain?"

"It's always belonged to her, jedge," spoke up Ezra Bobbett.

Always belonged to her! Reeves drew a quick breath. If this were so, then how had the trinket happened to be in the possession of Jim Rayner?

"That is true?" questioned the judge.

"Yes," answered Lady Ann, almost in a whisper.

Judge Brand straightened.

"So far as I know," he went on, "there are only two such chains in existence. One belonged to my old partner, Hugh Adams, one of the best men that ever prospected for gold in the Old West; and the other belonged, and still belongs, to me. I should like to know, Miss Bobbett, how you came to own this chain? Is it, by coincidence, a third strand of linked nuggets?"

"Jedge," spoke up Bobbett, "Lady Ann ain't of my blood. Her real name is Adams, not Bobbett."

Few among the Forty-Niners had suspected such a revelation, and it caught them gasping. A strange look crossed the face of Judge Brand.

"I want you and your wife, Mr. Bobbett," said he, "to come right up to my place with Lady Ann. A mighty wonderful thing has happened if all these statements are correct. I must know more about this at once."

He strode toward the street door. Robbins, as dazed as the others, followed him. Ma Bobbett got up unsteadily, took the bewildered Lady Ann by an arm and led her away. Ezra Bobbett trailed after them.

Reeves, perplexed by the sudden turn of events, faced around slowly to look at Gentleman Jim. The gambler was exchanging glances with Don Quesada.

What was wrong here? Reeves asked himself the question. That something was not right he felt deep down in the depths of his soul.

CHAPTER VI.

MEN OF NERVE.

IT was nearly midnight before Mr. and Mrs. Bobbett and Lady Ann emerged from the quarters of Judge Brand and made their way down the gloomy little street to the New York Bazar.

Camp festivities had long since ceased at El Rio Rey and the place was dark and deserted. Only two adobes on the "flat" showed a gleam, and these were the judge's house and the Spread Eagle Hotel.

Reeves, uneasy and suspicious, was in no mood for slumber. He sat on the bench outside the hotel door, and there Jim Rayner, the don, Vince, Catamount Cal, Smedders and Handy had passed him on their way to the bunkroom in the wing. Colonel Hungerford had paused for a word.

"What do you make of the doings at the honkatonk, Martin?" the colonel asked.

"Nothing at all," was Reeves's reply.

"Some surprising developments are on the way, if I'm any prophet. Lock the front door when you come to bed, will you? And put out the light in the office."

Reeves had kept his place on the bench at the door, reflecting deeply, but all to no purpose. He heard the Bobbetts as they came down the street, and he saw their dusky figures hover about the front of the Bazar while Ezra fumbled with the door-key.

"Land sakes, Ezra, are your fingers all thumbs?" complained the voice of Ma Bobbett. "You must be tur'ble excited, seems like."

"Ain't it enough to make a body excited, ma?" Ezra demanded, his voice thick with unwonted emotion. "To think of all this good luck comin' to our little Liddy Ann jest nat'rly—"

"You hush, Ezra. The judge says we're not to speak of it till everything is sure and

certain. You are apt to bubble over when you are in a taking like this, and I warn you."

Not a word from Lady Ann reached Reeves's ears. The door opened, the dim figures disappeared into the gloom beyond, the door closed and a bolt rattled; then there was a light, presently melting away toward the rear of the adobe.

Up the street the lamplight faded from the judge's windows. A man walked briskly past the hotel and turned in at the marshal's office. It was Robbins.

Within a few minutes, Martin Reeves was the only one in the Notch who had not gone to bed and to sleep. There in the old mining camp he seemed to be threading a maze, with things unknown hedging him round at every step.

When would the curtain lift so that he might see his way clearly? To the forebodings that had filled him before there was now added a sense of helplessness, of ignorance and inability in the affairs of Lady Ann.

His spirit was depressed and his heart was grieved and sore. Only when his thoughts concerned themselves with Gentleman Jim could he feel determined and competent.

That chain of linked nuggets! This, in all that maze of mystery, stood out clear and distinct. The chain was something tangible; something which, if the fates were kind, he could use as a starting point in unraveling Rayner's schemes.

It was nearly one o'clock when he locked the hotel door, blew out the light in the office and groped his way to bed. Although late in retiring, he was abroad early and taking his morning dip in the pool.

The talk of the camp was the eccentric old judge, and the way his course had crossed that of Lady Ann Bobbett, the evening before, at El Rio Rey. Lady Ann an Adams, and not a Bobbett at all! This development was bandied back and forth in hushed tones.

Ezra Bobbett had declared the fact, and the judge had seemed to make much of it, and of that nugget chain. But every theory regarding the linked nuggets, Lady Ann, Adams and the judge ran into nothing more substantial than thin air. All the Forty-Niners, except those about whom the mystery revolved, were left stranded on the reef of their own speculations.

Reeves wanted to get away from the talk, to be by himself so that he could think, if possible, to some purpose.

Hiring a saddle-horse of Smedders, he galloped down the gulch, and on into a lateral defile that opened out the wall of Nugget Gulch.

Half a mile up the smaller gash Reeves drew rein, hitched his horse to a lonely cottonwood, took to a boulder and fell into a brown study. He was not there long before a patter of hoofs roused him and he turned to see Lady Ann cantering toward him.

His heart bounded. In plain defiance of Jim Rayner the girl had taken to the saddle and followed.

"Trying to run away, Marty?" asked Lady Ann, as she slid to the ground and led her mount toward the cottonwood.

"There was too much guessing and chattering in the camp this morning, to suit me," he answered, "so I thought I would flock by myself for a while."

"I'm in the way, then?" she hazarded mischievously, her hazel eyes dancing.

"You—in the way?" He laughed. "You know better than that, Lady Ann. Do the Bobbetts know where you have come?"

"I took French leave, and no one in the camp knows where I am. I simply hired the horse of Lafe Smedders, after I saw you galloping off, and rode in this direction. Mr. Perdue told me you had turned this way."

He tied the horse for her and invited her to sit beside him on the big rock.

A wonderful transformation had been wrought in Lady Ann. There was a smile on her lips and happiness in her eyes; and she carried herself as one who had written a personal declaration of independence and was resolutely standing by its terms.

"My name is Adams, Marty," said she, "if the whole wonderful story is true, and I am more than twenty-one by a few months and able to do as I please. It pleased me to follow you, this morning, and have a talk. I want you to know of this marvellous thing that has happened to me, and how that magic chain of linked nuggets has bound me to my birthright.

"Of course," she added deprecatingly, "it isn't all settled yet, and I am supposed not to speak about it until the affair is cleared up beyond all doubt; but, Marty," and here her brown hand touched his caressingly, "I feel that I've just got to tell you. I can do it, too, without breaking a confidence."

"That's fine," returned Reeves heartily.

The girl's joy was infectious, and his face reflected the same brightness that filled hers. "Go right ahead and tell me about it. I don't know of anything else in this world that I'd rather hear."

"I'll have to begin this like a fairy tale," said Lady Ann gaily, "but it is one of the really true fairy tales, I'm sure.

"Once upon a time Judge Brand was a prospector in the West. That was long ago when the judge was a much younger man than he is now, and the West he knew was the Old West. He had a partner named Hugh Adams"—the musical voice softened on the name—"and the judge loved Hugh Adams as a brother. They prospected together, and starved and thirsted together, and then—they struck it rich together.

"You understand, Marty? Judge Brand and Hugh Adams found a mine and sold it for two fortunes; then the judge went East, but his partner stayed West. Hugh Adams couldn't tear himself away from the country he loved and that had been so good to him, but the judge had a sister in York State and felt that she needed him."

Lady Ann paused to note the effect of the recital on her companion.

"You are right, *mujercita,*" remarked Reeves, "this does sound like a fairy tale."

"Why, I haven't come to that part of it yet!" she exclaimed. "Now, listen. After years and years, the judge got a letter from his old partner. Hugh Adams had married, and had lived at a place called Moccasin, in Utah.

"His wife"—again the soft voice dropped tenderly—"had died. Broken hearted, Hugh Adams left his baby girl with an old friend and his wife and had gone to San Francisco, and from there in a boat to the South Seas. Two or three years later he came back to Utah, but the friends with whom he had left the little girl had died, and some one else had taken her. Hugh Adams couldn't find out who these people were, or where they had gone.

"Not much was left of the town of Moccasin, Marty, when Hugh Adams came back to it. I reckon it was a good deal like Rattlesnake City before we got here. Hugh Adams had been hurt, and he could not live. So he wrote his old partner, the judge, and asked him to do what he could to find the little girl, Lorena Adams, and to hold in trust for her a fortune of—of—oh, several hundred thousand dollars, Judge Brand says. And, Marty," here Lady Ann's voice quivered with excitement, "it seems that I am Lorena Adams and—and that all the money is mine!"

Reeves was dazed, almost staggered. The girl got up, faced him, put both her hands on his shoulders and looked into his eyes.

"Aren't you glad for me, Marty?" she whispered. "I can't begin to tell you how I felt when I was blind to all this, when I didn't know who my people were, or what had happened to them, or how I came to be Liddy Ann Bobbett. But now can't you see how different everything is?"

"I can hold up my head, Marty, with any of them! I feel as though I had passed through a long, dreadful night and had wakened to the most beautiful day that ever was! You said that nothing made any difference to you but"—and her eyes reflected a love that was deep and abiding—"this must make a difference, a big difference! Why, the Girl of Castle's Forty-Nine Camp has become an heiress, just like you read in a book! Marty! Why don't you say something?"

He sprang up suddenly.

"What can I say," he answered, "except that I am happier for you, I think, than you are for yourself. The penniless Tenderfoot of the Camp, Lady Ann, would be a pretty poor stick if he could not rejoice with you in your good fortune."

A gulf, however, seemed to have opened suddenly at his feet. And on one side of the gulf he stood; and on the other side was Miss Lorena Adams.

Martin Reeves had pride, and he wanted to work with his own hands for the woman he loved. Without a stiver to his name, how was he to play the rôle which meant so much to his happiness and peace of mind?

Nevertheless, he took Lady Ann in his arms and, while she clung to him, he kissed her, and, at last, seated her on the rock again.

"Now," he went on, as he dropped at her side, "proceed with the fairy tale. Tell me about the chain of nuggets."

"That is another strange part of it, Marty," went on the girl. "I never saw that chain until just before we went to El Rio Rey last evening. Ezra Bobbett had had it stowed away somewhere. He brought it out, told me it had been about my neck when I was passed on to him and Ma Bobbett by Hugh Adams's friends in Moccasin, Utah.

"The few people who still lived in Moccasin thought Hugh Adams had been drowned in the South Seas, and the nugget chain had been kept as a sort of proof of my identity in case it was ever necessary to be used for such a purpose. Wasn't that splendid of Pa Bobbett? I can't begin to tell you how many times the Bobbetts have been down to their last nickel, but Ezra never once thought of selling the chain. It is worth several hundred dollars, Judge Brand says."

"You say the matter isn't finally settled yet," said Reeves. "Seems to me it is plain enough. What doubts remain to be cleared up?"

"I don't know, exactly," answered the girl, puzzled. "The judge just told us to keep quiet for a while, so that he may consider the matter further. Judge Brand is a wonderful man, Marty!"

"I think so myself. But what is he doing here? What sort of connection is there between him and Robbins? Why have the activities of the old camp been revived?" Reeves's brow clouded. "It all seems like a foolish farce!" he added.

"The judge didn't tell us anything about that. Mr. Robbins warned us not to let the judge know that we were merely playing Western parts for Mr. Castle."

Reeves laughed.

"The judge is too sharp to be fooled very long," he averred. "What does Judge Brand think, anyway? That all this crowd of Make-Believes has been gathered up hit and miss?"

Lady Ann laughed, and patted his arm.

"You are not a Make-Believe, Marty, anyhow," she said. "You are the Tenderfoot. And I'll not be a Make-Believe much longer, either. I shall be the wealthy Miss Lorena Adams. And what am I to do with my money?" Her forehead puckered and her hazel eyes half-closed over the problem. "I shall need somebody I can trust to tell me about that," she finished.

"Judge Brand would be a good man to advise," Reeves suggested.

She gave her head a little fling.

"I wasn't thinking of the judge," she answered. "But I must go back; they'll be needing me at the Bazar. Suppose we ride back to camp together?"

He hesitated, thinking of Jim Rayner, but only for a moment. Then, side by side, they galloped into the gulch and on into the camp.

"What's going on, Marty?" asked Lady Ann. "There's a crowd in front of the hotel, and Catamount Cal is talking from the seat of the old stage-coach."

Reeves had already taken note of the crowd and the coach, but he had heard of nothing scheduled for the forenoon that concerned itself with such a gathering. Although the four mules attached to the coach were fresh and restive, yet the hand on the "ribbons" held them firmly in check. Nor was it Catamount Cal's hand—Reeves presently discovered that.

"As I live, Lady Ann," he exclaimed, "it's Judge Brand on the box!"

They turned out of the street at the side of the hotel, skirted the crowd's edge and so came to the corral.

Judge Brand was talking, but Reeves did not hear what he said. Rayner had his eyes on the returning riders, and there was a malevolence in his glance that held Reeves's entire attention.

Lady Ann must have seen the gambler, for a momentary cloud crossed her face and she looked anxiously at her companion. Reeves made no comments, but helped the girl from her horse.

Smedders was not around, so the mounts were left hitched to corral posts. Lady Ann proceeded at once to the Bazar while Reeves joined the little crowd of Forty-Niners.

"I want to load up this old coach with men of nerve," the judge was saying. "It's a fine morning and I feel like taking a ride. But I want company. If there are four or five of you who are not altogether spineless, climb aboard and we'll be off. Who's the first man to accept my invitation?"

The Forty-Niners had seen just enough of the judge to be a little afraid of him. The fact that he had called for "men of nerve" as passengers, suggested hazards and worked on the wary spirits of the crowd. No one stepped forward. The judge's face expressed derision and contempt.

"Don't all speak at once," he went on mockingly; "I can't use more than four or five of you. I'm eager to trim a few corners on an old down-grade and this rattletrap isn't any too safe. If I can't get five men, how about four, or three?"

An awed hush pervaded the crowd. No one spoke or stirred.

"You're a fine bunch of Westerners I must say," scoffed the judge, "a regular

white-feathered outfit. Have I got to take this little joy-ride alone?"

"I'll go with you!" called Reeves, moving forward.

A quick glow lighted up the judge's face.

"The Tenderfoot!" he cried. "Time was when the West was full of real men, but now they seem mostly to come from the East. Get up here with me, Reeves; we'll pull this off alone if we have to."

"Glory to glory and all sashay!" bellowed a voice. "I don't take no back seat for a Tenderfoot, not me! Where'll I ride, jedge?"

It was Perdue. Judge Brand smiled delightedly.

"The Bad Man from Bad Ax has really some sand," he remarked. "Get inside, Perdue."

The little man was in a highly nervous condition, as could be readily seen, but he had a desire to regain some of his lost prestige in the eyes of the judge. Opening the door, he scrambled into the coach.

"I'll go," said Gentleman Jim calmly. "I was only hanging back to give some one else a chance."

"Count me in, by juniper!" whooped Pop Handy.

"If I didn't have to look after this hotel, suh," breathed Colonel Hungerford in wheezy regret, "you'd have to jump on me to hold me back."

"I got hosses to look out fer," put in Lafe Smedders, "an' that's all that makes me hang fire."

"I'm with ye, jedge," grunted Catamount Cal.

"Get up here, Cal," said Brand. "I want to show you the old trail out of the gulch to Penyan, only we'll take it coming and on the down-grade."

Catamount Cal hesitated for a fraction of a second, with one foot on the hub of a forward wheel. Perdue pushed a wild and despairing face out of one of the coach windows.

"Did the jedge say the old trail to Penyan?" he inquired faintly.

"That's what, Purdy," said Castle.

"I want Middling to have my carved leather belt," went on Perdue, "and the stag-handled dirk is fer Smedders."

"Stow that!" growled Pop Handy, nervously.

Nearly all the Forty-Niners had seen that old trail that twisted up the gulch wall on the way to Penyan. In places it was almost straight up and down, and in other spots it described circles with precipices on one side and sheer walls on the other. Then, for years and years, it had remained unused and crumbling.

To come down the face of the cliff in an ancient vehicle, bought at a bargain for show purposes, and piloted by an Easterner who might, after all, be a rank amateur with the reins, was more than enough to fill the passengers with direful forebodings.

"Catamount is changin' his mind," somebody remarked.

"What about it, Catamount?" inquired the judge grimly.

Catamount Cal swore under his breath, climbed up and squeezed into the seat beside Martin Reeves.

"Any one else want a thrill?" asked Judge Brand.

No one else did; and the judge, with a wild yell, gave the mules their heads and the crazy old coach went lurching and swaying down the gulch.

To reach the Penyan trail the judge should have gone up instead of down the defile. Perhaps, some of the passengers must have reasoned, he was only bluffing and did not intend to attempt the fearsome old goat-path. Judge Brand, however, settled the doubt.

"We'll slide out by the Rocky Spur road, gentleman," he announced, "then doubleback and hit the Penyan trail well on the other side of camp. Last time I took that high dive was more than thirty years ago, and we nosed kingdom come by a hair. I had six good horses, though, and chains on the wheels. How about these mules, Cal?"

"Most onery critters you can imagine," answered Cal, between his teeth.

"Brakes in good shape?"

"They wouldn't hold a toy wagon on a level straightaway."

The old Westerner cackled delightedly.

"I'm that hungry for excitement, gentlemen," said he, "that I wouldn't sell out my interest in this joy ride for ten thousand dollars. Of course, I'm not so young as I used to be," he added apologetically, "and I may have lost some of my knack as a whip, but if everything holds I'm pretty sure I'll get you down."

There was a wild light in Catamount Cal's eyes.

"I'll do what I kin with the brake, jedge," he whispered hoarsely; "jest you watch them mules."

"You leave the brake alone!" ordered the judge. "This is my treat and I won't have any one cutting in on me."

Reeves knew the eccentric old judge was set on having his way, and that he would have it even if he wrecked the coach and killed passengers and mules. But there was a dare-devil impulse stirring in Reeves, and he made up his mind to see the thing through.

Leaving the gulch by the easy slope of the Rocky Spur road, they turned the other way, covered two miles and came into the Penyan trail. There the judge squared around, a quarter of a mile from the gulch rim, and set the mules at the gloomy chasm on a run.

Only a faint depression in the plain marked the course of the ancient trail. The mules seemed confused, but the judge guided them handily.

Reeves had been observing the judge's work with the reins, and admiration slowly rose in him. The old gentleman was a splendid driver, there was not the least doubt about that; nevertheless, what would skill amount to if the trail's edge crumbled under the wheels?

The shaky old vehicle bounded up on the rim rock. 'Way down below was the thin, white thread of Nugget Creek. The trail, barely discernible, dropped over and skirted a shoulder of granite with nothing but dizzy space on one side.

"B—better slow down a mite, jedge!" gulped Catamount Cal.

The judge paid no attention. With a leap the coach took the descent. Slam went the coach door.

"Who's out?" yelled the judge, eyes ahead, a pair of lines in each hand and one foot on the clumsy old brake.

"Pop Handy," answered Reeves, stealing a frantic look behind.

Handy was picking himself off the rim-rock, groping for his hat and drawing a flannel sleeve across his moist brows.

"One!" yelled the judge, exultantly.

"Make it two!" howled Catamount Cal; "ye're crazier nor a loon!"

With that he rolled off the box, taking chances on coming safely out of the spill rather than stay with the judge and face graver dangers. He landed in a heap at the foot of the granite shoulder; and Reeves, hanging on for dear life, had a glimpse of him staggering erect and hugging the stone wall.

The coach rounded the shoulder with two wheels in the air. Then followed a few rods of almost level going while the trail gathered itself for a jump over the next drop. The door was swinging. Some one, with a wild cry, fell out of it and missed tumbling over the edge by a hair's breadth.

"Who was that, Reeves?" roared the judge.

"Rayner!" gasped Reeves, and had to speak twice before the judge heard him.

"Three!" whooped the headstrong old man in what seemed like an abandon of joy.

Was Judge Brand really crazy? The Tenderfoot had few thoughts apart from those aroused by that hair-raising ride, but this managed to occur to him. It hardly seemed possible that any sane man would behave as the judge was doing then.

Another turn carried the creaking, groaning old coach down a few yards of almost sheer wall—a sort of causeway with a chasm on either side. The vehicle careened and seemed on the point of somersaulting sideways into the depths.

"Wait!" wailed Perdue from inside; "le'me out!"

No attention was paid to him. The coach, as by a miracle, righted itself and another twist brought it out upon a short stretch of wide ground. There the little man from Bad Ax chose the less of two evils and projected himself straight outward between the whirling wheels.

"There goes Perdue!" reported Reeves.

"Four!" roared Judge Brand, reaching for the long-lashed whip. "You're the last passenger, Reeves, and the toughest bit of going is just ahead. Whoop!"

The Tenderfoot hung on. A filmy curtain swayed before his eyes and he could see but indistinctly.

(To Be Continued.)

TRYST

FLUTTER of moth's wings 'mid the pale primroses;
Shimmer of starlight opaling the dew;
Bird-song that droops and dies in dreamy closes,
And waiting by the garden gateway—*You!*

Clinton Scollard.

A Good Indian

by William Alfred Corey

THIS one was not dead, the old saying to the contrary notwithstanding. Sometimes he was called "the General." But this was only a kindly sarcasm. For the title was unofficial and had its origin in the coat he wore—the coat with the frayed remnants of gold braid about the sleeves, the brass buttons and the epaulets—such a coat as army officers a score of years ago sported on parades and special occasions.

The old Indian had acquired this prize out of the largess of some army post housecleaning and it had been to him as the purple robe of royalty. It had made him a lasting friend of the white men; it and the ancient, high silk hat that had likewise been wished on him by somebody with a sense of the ludicrous.

Except for a rag about his middle, old Winnemuka never wore anything, summer or winter, storm or shine, but his military coat and Daniel Webster hat. Shirt and shoes were superfluous and his hardened, leathery old legs no more needed trousers than a rhinoceros needs pajamas.

He went about clothed principally in dignity. Winnemuka had dignity of two kinds—the dignity of his race and also the dignity of great age. He fairly exuded dignity. When, along with his retinue of wives and brood of dirty children and flea-bitten dogs, he appeared in some sage-brush hamlet he was almost the only really dignified object in sight.

If he visited Los Angeles, which he did occasionally, and stalked solemnly about the streets, he had more dignity that the tourists who took pictures of him and some of the women who laughed behind his back. And this in spite of what he wore, or didn't wear.

For years almost out of recollection old Winnemuka had been a friend of the white men. And there had been occasions, never doubt, when the shrewd old chief's friendship had counted for much.

Time was when the Piutes were numerous, like the spines on the cactus and the greasewood on the sun-baked plains, and many hot blooded braves had taken their orders from Winnemuka's sober lips. The desert of the Sierras and north of the Sierra Madres is a land of unchronicled horrors. But there would have been more horrors to go unchronicled if it hadn't been for Winnemuka.

For many a white man's westward toiling wagon train had been saved from ambush and annihilation because Winnemuka had said no.

With, truth to tell, very little to warrant the flattery of his esteem, the old man had high regard for the white men. And especially was he regardful of a particular white man, to wit, Borax Brown.

The reason for this especial attraction is a story in itself and need not be gone into here. Suffice to say, Brown, of borax fame, had been on Winnemuka's calling list for

many, many moons. And so when "the General" learned that Brown's pay car was to be robbed on its way across the desert he determined to serve his friend by thwarting the scheme.

It wasn't nearly as simple as Winnemuka had anticipated. He, untutored red man that he was, had supposed that all he would have to do would be to go to the two men, employees of the borax king, having the money in charge, and tell them what he had seen and heard, lying supposedly in the sleep of drunken forgetfulness behind a clump of willows on the bank of the Mojave; tell them that Dago Joe, a renegade named Kill Develin and a Mexican known as Manuel Lopez, had "fixed" their water supply so as to leave them dry and stranded somewhere in the trackless wilds of Inyo County; and then, when thirst and the vultures were through with them had planned to swoop down on their bags of coin.

Winnemuka's English was wretchedly bad. He had never even heard of Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Still he thought he could make the drivers of the motor car understand. He could even, if necessary, go to the compartment in the rear of their machine and show them the carpet tacks that had been adroitly sifted in about the water bags to puncture them and drain away their precious contents through dozens of little holes, once the car was under way.

But Winnemuka's well meant tip failed to get past. When, in the sudden dusk of the desert evening, he approached the camp of the two couriers just outside the town of Barstow would they listen to him? They would not.

To them he was not Winnemuka, the pathetic reminiscence of past greatness, the aged historian of the sand-blown wastes; he was just a dirty vagabond beggar, hardly better that the rabble of villainous dogs that kept him company. Notwithstanding his army coat and high hat they would not listen to his deep-throated, guttural attempts to speak.

Off with him! Begone! They had nothing for him or his dogs. And when Al Truman, springing to his feet, grabbed a rifle out of the car, Winnemuka gave it up and ordered a precipitate retreat that became a disorderly rout and did not end until he had gained once more the willows that fringed the river bank.

One would have thought the old chief would have been peeved at this outrageous treatment. Even Christian forbearance has its limitations. If the old Indian had washed his hands (only Winnemuka never washed his hands) of the whole affair and consigned those town guys gladly to the burning death that awaited them, one could hardly have blamed him.

But Winnemuka took no such stand. He was not even offended. He was as emotionless as a fossil fish. He would not raise those hirelings to his level, or degrade himself to theirs, by calling upon his Piute gods to damn them.

He had been a chief; was still a chief, for that matter, and had had associations with generals and leaders among the white men. These underlings were unworthy of his ire.

Besides, it wasn't these fellows he was serving anyway. It was Borax Brown, his friend, whose employees they were and whose gold they were carrying.

So, being unable to thwart the outlaws directly, he set about doing it indirectly. He turned all the matchless resources of his Indian cunning, all his intimate knowledge of the desert, all his tireless patience and endurance, all his intuitive prescience, all the stoical courage of his race against the human vultures and in favor of the witless numbskulls who had spurned him.

That night Winnemuka's old eyes (still keen and piercing though only his Maker knew how old he was), watched the renegades' camp from the willows by the river. In the stillness of the starlit desert night his alert ears caught their words as they talked in sepulchral tones of their plans.

Driving a buckboard with a team of stout mules they were to set out into the desert the next morning. They would start north east as though bound for the Calico Hills and the lime kilns located there. A few miles east of Barstow they would swing north and then west, going leisurely so as to give the pay car, which was not to leave until the following morning, time to get well on its way.

Then they would cut in behind it, take up its trail and follow it, like a pack of cowardly wolves, until their quarry, crazed by thirst had died or wandered off into the desert, leaving the gold unguarded.

The treacherous visit of Dago Joe to the couriers and the clever trick of the carpet tacks had made it reasonably certain that fifty or sixty miles from Barstow would

find the borax men without water to drink or to supply their radiator. And with a dead machine the rest would be easy.

For hours the crafty old Indian watched and listened. After a while the low voiced talk grew intermittent. Then one by one the men yawned, wrapped themselves in their blankets and fell asleep.

They stood no guard. They even had no dog. They felt secure. There was to be no hold-up, no bloodshed, no shooting. They had simply planned to "find" a cache of gold somewhere on the trail to Borax Flats.

When the deep and regular breathing told Winnemuka's listening ears that the men were asleep he began crawling on his belly toward their wagon, which was north of the river bank. There was a breeze from the north which prevented his scent reaching the mules tethered just beyond the vehicle.

Noiselessly he left the willows and crawled through the bunch grass toward the wagon. All the wily cunning of uncounted Indian generations came to his aid; all the patience, all the Indian's genius for concealment was put to use. A cat or a shadow could not have been more noiseless.

He reached the wagon. He listened. The men were sleeping the sleep of good digestions, if not clear consciences. Like an apparation the Indian rose to his feet. With fingers of velvet he loosened and lowered the wagon's end gate.

There were three five-gallon oil cans there, filled with water. One by one Winnemuka lifted those heavy cans and lowered them to the ground. Then, first two, one in either hand, and then the other, he spirited them to the willows, down into the dry graveled river-bed, then across to the rear end of of Bert Stovel's grocery store on the south bank.

Stovel kept his can and barrels of coal oil and gasoline there, in a little shed. Winnemuka substituted the three cans of river water for three similar cans of kerosene. Laboriously he carried the cans of oil back across the dry river-bed, up the bank, through the willows and across the stretch of bunch grass. Silently he replaced them in the wagon and refastened the end gate. Then he folded his tents, like the Arabs, and silently stole away.

He may have chuckled to himself, but it is highly unlikely. It probably never entered Winnemuka's mind that he had done anything to laugh about. Besides Winnemuka was never known to laugh. He was too unbendingly dignified to laugh.

The next morning Winnemuka watched the plotters cook their breakfast, eat it, then hitch up their mules and drive joyfully away with their ballast of coal oil in the rear of the wagon. They had canteens and other small receptacles full of water in the front to meet immediate needs. The cans in the rear were the reserve, not to be drawn until the journey was well along.

After the tough trio were out of sight Winnemuka got busy. He suddenly remembered an appointment in the desert. So, with a few explanatory grunts to his squaws and brats over on the main street of Barstow, he mounted a pony and left them to continue selling their woven baskets and other trinkets to the tourists on the daily trains and took himself off into the sage brush.

He carried, slung across his animal, besides his blanket, a generous assortment of empty army canteens, with a few strips of sun-dried meat and a little water for himself and pony. The men of the pay automobile would badly need water when they discovered the empty bags, and Winnemuka knew where there was a spring over near a southern spur of the Panamint range.

In fact he knew where there were two springs; one on either side of a bald ridge. One spring was sweet and pure, the other was alkali and very bad. He would reach the sweet water, fill his canteens, then turn back and meet the car before the heat and thirst had taken their toll of life. Maybe by that time his meaning would pierce the drivers' thick skulls.

Clad, as always, in his army coat and his dignity, and wearing the hat that might have befitted a doctor of divinity, Winnemuka trotted across the graveled bed of the Mojave and bent his course straight north toward Death Valley. His long, sun-seared legs hanging almost to the ground across the back of the little Indian pony, his canteens dangling and rattling, he looked neither to right nor left, but straight toward the hills for which he was making.

He deigned not even to glance toward the motor-car. He probably despised the two men, even though he was arranging to save their lives. But wasn't Borax Brown his friend?

He left the Mojave behind him, an irregular, winding line of green willows, with

the railroad beyond it. The little straggling, sun-bleached town soon faded into the gray landscape. He reached the first line of low hills north of the river, crossed it and kept on north, a slow-moving atom in an ocean of gray and pale green.

The Indian was not only inured to the climate and other conditions of this savage land, but he knew its topography as well as teacher knows her multiplication table.

Straight ahead of him, seventy-five miles away, lay Death Valley, with the Armagosy and Kingston ranges on the east, the Panamint and Slate ranges to the west and Borax Flats, the destination of the pay machine, still farther west. At various points in the gray distance Winnemuka could locate Granite Peak, Owl's Head, Pyramid Peak, "Skiddoo" and Black Crater.

The motor-car's trail would be between Black Crater and the southern end of the Panamint range. And the springs that Winnemuka knew of—the good and the bad—were also in this vicinity.

All day the old chief's pony trotted toward Black Crater, never hurrying, never slacking; winding about among the greasewood and giant cactus, but moving ever toward the goal of sweet water. When the desert night fell the pony and his rider each drank some water sparingly, then ate a little—the one nibbling the greasewood, the other gnawing the dried meat—and then the rider rolled himself in his blanket and slept.

The next morning Winnemuka pushed on and about mid-afternoon reached the spring of good water at the eastern foot of Black Crater. He knew the automobile was already on its way, and he planned to fill his canteens and put back the next morning so as to meet it before the lack of water had become desperate. The would-be robbers had probably discovered their plight in time to turn about and get back to Barstow and water before *their* fix became desperate. Whether they had or not was none of Winnemuka's concern.

But the trio had not turned back, and their failure to do so did concern Winnemuka, after all. For, a few miles on his return trip the next forenoon, the rescuer sighted the men he had so far outwitted. They had pushed on instead of turning back, and no doubt had forgotten their dreams of somebody's else gold in their fevered thirst for water.

Winnemuka drew his pony's rein and considered what to do. He had been seen and must face the three, since he was unarmed and there were long-ranged rifles in the buckboard. But the renegades were still several miles away, and there was time to spring off his pony and cache all his water canteens but one partially filled one—just enough water to prevent suspicion and at the same time leave the enemy good and dry. For the rest the Lord would guide him.

An hour later Winnemuka, virtuously surprised and much concerned and eloquent with his gruntings and gestures, met the buckboard. Men and mules were suffering terribly with thirst. The coal oil had proved a poor substitute for real water.

Lips were parched, tongues were beginning to swell and Dago Joe was growing delirious. There was a rush for Winnemuka's canteen and the burning desert air grew even more heated as the men cursed each other and snatched it from each other's lips.

But, though wofully inadequate, the little store of water renewed life and then the Indian was peremptorily ordered to guide them to more.

What? An Indian not know where to find water? *Deus!* He would guide them to water or the coyotes would pick his bones. And Manuel Lopez reached into the buckboard for the rifle.

So Winnemuka led the rascally outfit to water. But not to the good water. He piloted them over the bald spur at the foot of Black Crater to the alkali spring on the western side. He knew his life would probably pay for it. But wasn't Borax Brown his friend?

They reached the black, brackish water and, unable to resist the temptation, the white men threw themselves on their stomachs and drank. Of course they drank too much, only any at all of that villainous liquid would have been too much. Then they vomited it up and were deathly sick.

When they had all but brought up the very linings of their stomachs they were almost too weak to stand. But they were not too weak to curse old Winnemuka in a plenteous variety of languages, and finally Dago Joe proposed that they fill the Indian's hide full of lead and sink his carcass in the hell's brew he had brought them to.

The suggestion called for no debate and the aged chieftain's arms were quickly bound behind his back and his long legs

tied under his pony's belly. Then three ruffians took their places and three eager rifles were raised.

But first Lopez had an idea.

"Buenos aqui?" he called out to Winnemuka. *"Savvy buenos aqui?"* There would yet be a chance for him if he led them to good water.

It was the offer of a reprieve on the brink of death. But, looking into the little bores of three rifles, Winnemuka shook his head.

He was an Indian, and there were many things he did not know. But he knew how to die. There was water, pure and sweet and sparkling, less than a mile from where they stood. But Winnemuka knew how to die. Borax Brown was his friend.

The firing squad were impatient and not disposed to parley. At the end of a very brief moment Lopez spoke and the three rifles were again brought to bear.

But the guns did not speak. For at that instant there was the crack of another rifle somewhere to the south and Winnemuka's pony jumped to one side, sank to his knees, then rolled over on his side, pinioning one of his rider's legs under him.

There were other shots, then Al Truman and his partner rushed up, covering the renegades and disarming them. Winnemuka was disentangled from his pony.

Truman had seen from a distance what was about to take place and, remembering the Indian's visit at Barstow, a great light had come to him. There wasn't time to reach the scene of the intended execution and argue the matter. So he had drawn a bead on the pony as a diversion.

He didn't know as yet all the ins and outs of what was doing, but it was safe to save the Indian's life anyway. Their water supply had given out under suspicious circumstances, but a case of canned tomatoes had come in handy as a substitute, and they had not suffered greatly, though canned tomatoes will not run an automobile.

The three luckless seekers of other men's gold were now bound securely, and after Winnemuka had suddenly remembered where there was a spring of fresh water not far away, all parties, would-be robbers, borax men and guide proceeded to Borax Flats; the men to accomplish their errand, the suspects to have their cases inquired into and the old Indian to be properly and gratefully received by his friend Borax Brown.

And, oh yes! The suspects were given nothing but alkali water to drink on the journey, Truman arguing that, whatever the degree of their guilt, this much punishment could not go amiss.

SONG OF THE SUN-DIAL

ROSES, radiant of luster,
Round about the dial cluster;
Ah, happy dial,
With thine fair espial!
Then the ruthless winter blows,
And where, I prithee, is the rose?
Buried deep beneath the snows!
Ah, unhappy dial!

Lovers in the scented weather
At the dial meet together;
Ah, happy dial,
With thine fair espial!
Then the ruthless winter blows,
But lovers are not like the rose;
What care they for deep, deep snows?
Happy, happy dial!

Sennett Stephens.

From Dusk to Dark

by George M. A. Cain

Author of "Four Speeds for Forest Hill," etc.

A THREE-PART STORY—PART ONE.

CHAPTER I.

JUST TO GET A MATCH.

IT seemed to have grown dusk suddenly. As a matter of fact, the fading of daylight had been no less a prolonged process than usual. To Helen Rainsford the fading was as an external sign of what had just taken place within her soul.

"It's getting dark," Morris Ballard mentioned in a tone which indicated difficulty in controlling his voice. "I'll have to light up."

From the sublime to the utterly commonplace! For an hour, as they had let the little runabout bear them along roads that always dodged the towns lest he must give too much attention to his driving, he had been trying to lead the conversation up to the great question which might settle their futures for better or for worse.

For an hour she had seemed to place an invisible, unspoken barrier between him and the definite words he sought. He had been forced to the feeling that she was bored with the story of his hopes and ambitions, that his hints at the desire for a wife and home and a more settled life were actually tedious to her.

At length, in sheer desperation, he had begun all over again, in a rush at the real point:

"Helen, we can't go on like this forever."

And she had piped a funny little nervous laugh.

"I should say not. We'd bounce right off into the mucky Passaic about opposite the Public Service gas works."

It was a rebuff. He could not take it otherwise. Surely there had been little possibility of mistaking his meaning. She had deliberately prevented a declaration.

"Good Lord!" he muttered now. "I used my last match half an hour ago."

He had been smoking furiously, as is the manner of men with a tremendous question on their lips, if they are permitted to smoke at all.

"I'll have to get a light, though. We'll stop at the first one of these houses that shows any signs of animation."

They were driving along Passaic Avenue, on the eastern side of the river, some two miles and a half above the point where it enters that overflow portion of Newark, known variously as Arlington, Kearny, and Harrison. It is a lonely road, though there is a sprinkling of ancient, pretentious houses on big estates that recall the days when the Passaic River ran with water instead of sewage.

They passed two of these shrouded in darkness. It gave Morris time to remark that he was going to equip the little second-hand car with electric lights.

"Hope we find a live house soon. If it gets much darker we'll be in danger of getting run into."

Hardly had the words been spoken when a light gleamed forth from a third house, which stood on a little hillock between the road and the river.

"Here we are," he said, his voice still showing the strain of an effort to hide his disappointment, and drew to the side of the road.

The dusk, which had been quite deep before either of them had noted it at all, had

shaded by now almost into dark. The stillness was only enhanced by that vast, dim murmur of sound that denoted the nearness of the big city.

Helen could not see Morris by the time he had trodden half of the hundred feet from the broken-down gate to the house with its single gleam of light.

A sense of chill loneliness came upon her. She had lost him.

The thought sent a shiver through her, though the May evening was quite warm.

Why had she held aloof? She was on the verge of tears at the thought of it now, her heart heavy as lead.

She loved him—loved him—only God could know how much. For him she would willingly have lived on the merest pittance, though that was quite unnecessary. His fifteen hundred a year was ample to keep her as well as she had ever been accustomed to live.

Why—why could she not learn the art that seemed the heritage of womankind from all generations, the art of giving just enough encouragement to bring forward the declaration of love? Why must the thought that he was on the point of putting the great query set her into a panic of expectation that had all the outward results of a panic of fear?

Why could she never find that happy medium of speech which neither rebuffed nor seemed unmaidenly eager.

She knew that she was known amongst her friends as over-diffident, a little too shy. But other shy women had won men, won the men they desired. She wondered, as she waited in the little car, if their love could have been so big, so fairly terrifying in its immensity, as hers seemed.

It was the fifth time she had lost him. Four times before he had spoken as he had spoken this afternoon. And each time it had taken months before he approached the difficult subject again. He, too, was shy.

Had she lost him this time for good? Or, might she be as sure of his return to another attempt as she was of his return with the matches. At the best they were losing years that might have been the happiest of their lives—losing them solely for her insurmountable diffidence.

She heard his step as he mounted the wooden porch of the old house. Then she saw dimly the outline of the door. The light had not been carried to the vestibule to afford her perfect sureness as to whether he had entered or still waited outside for the return of the householder with the desired matches.

Almost instantly the light went out. She thought it was probably an old-fashioned oil lamp, carried to some other room in search of the matches. Presently it returned, though, under different circumstances, she would have thought it was first the lighting of a match and then of a lamp.

She was glad that Morris would be back quickly. The darkness oppressed her. There seemed something almost ghostly in the reflected gleam of some street-light on the other side of the river, visible in the water, but hidden from direct view.

From somewhere far ahead sounded the sharp snarl of a mechanical horn, somehow reminding her of jitney buses and taxicabs. She reflected nervously that Morris had got the car none too far to the side of the road, which was rather narrow, anyhow. Soon she could hear the motor of the on-coming car.

Though its muffler was closed, the sound seemed to convey the idea of speed. Helen grew frightened. She cast a hurried glance toward the house again. Still the door had not reopened.

The road had darkened to hardly more than a barely perceptible gray against the surrounding black of trees and brush at either side. She found her eyes straining forward as the burring motor seemed to draw swiftly nearer without her being able to catch any gleam of its lights.

Then, like a black apparition, it loomed up out of the dimness. It was hardly fifty yards away. It was swerving to its left—toward her!

She gave a little, frightened scream. At the same instant she assured herself that the thing was a taxicab, and that it was slowing up. Relieved, she bethought herself of the horn and pressed the bulb.

The result was startling. The sound seemed to be itself terrifying to the girl there in the darkness, with that unlighted car before her. But that was not all. A violent oath was muttered by a man inside the taxicab.

"What the devil is that?" he asked, and almost instantly followed with a sharp command: " Drive on."

It seemed to the girl that she heard the voice mumbling angrily as the chauffeur speeded his motor, flung in the clutch and sent his machine leaping past, missing Mor-

ris's recently painted mud-guard by a hair's breadth.

Something about the incident seemed so sinister that the girl sat shivering for several minutes, her eyes vainly searching the lighted window for some sign of life.

Whatever was taking place in that room happened beyond the lamp. The light was screened by old-fashioned blinds. She could see nothing.

Half fearful of the very sound itself, she began to toot the horn, the noise fairly grinding on her nerves, keyed now to the breaking point.

A wave of anger, the first she had ever felt toward her lover, was aroused by his delay. That he should leave her thus in a position of real danger, while he engaged in some conversation with utter strangers, seemed the very essence of rudeness.

But her fingers wearied of the futile pressing of the bulb. She continued to sound the horn at intervals, its echo seeming the only real noise. Then she heard a motor again, this time behind her.

As it came on she began to feel certain it was the same taxicab that had nearly struck her car a moment earlier. The thought nearly drove her to panic. But the sound of that motor, one of the two-cylinder variety still installed in some taxis, was unmistakable.

Turning about she was unable to see anything of its approach. She tooted the horn again furiously. The cab drew closer, black, ghostly, terrible, simply because it should have been lighted and wasn't.

Then it slowed again, as before. She shuddered, wondering if its rough-spoken occupant would attempt to address her. About ten yards behind Morris's runabout it came to a complete stop.

The thing that happened then nearly threw the girl into hysterics. The other car's headlights were both turned on, their brilliant flare flashing squarely into her eyes, as she turned and continued to stare in fascinated fear.

It seemed that the man inside the car opened the door and looked her over, for she heard the bang of the catch as, in response to his sharp command, it once more passed her by, the lights switched off again as quickly as they had been turned on.

She had known what it is to lose voice from sheer fright. At the flash of the lamps she had tried to cry out with all the power of her lungs. The result had been but a whisper of Morris's name.

A few seconds more she sat still, almost paralyzed with fear. Then, pulling herself together, she climbed from the car and forced herself to enter the yard and approach the house.

That the yard was overgrown with weeds she had almost taken for granted in the dusk from what she could see of the dilapidated fence. But the fact that there was a light in the house had kept her from expecting the desolated, deserted, unoccupied appearance of the building, which seemed to stand out above all else in the darkness.

Once it had been white, of the colonial type. Now the white was black at the entire base of the building, and blotched with darkened wood, where great streaks of the paint had peeled away. And what remained had turned to a dingy lead color.

Once there had been a roof to the porch; but this had been pulled down, without any attempt to conceal the sockets left, like torn-out eyes, in the weather-boarding.

Though knowing that her lover was within, though hearing the sound of a voice apparently addressing Morris in a tone of stress, she found it a distinct effort to bring herself to feel over the sides of the door-frame for a bell.

All she found was a hole in the wall, where once had been a bell-pull. She knocked then on the broad panel.

Instantly the voice within was hushed. The light faded. There was a hasty banging of a door somewhere inside.

Helen Rainsford was on the point of running back in a panicky, unaccountable fear such as had possessed her almost from the first approach to the place, when the door was opened suddenly. An oil lamp was held high enough to throw something of a glare into her eyes, but she was able to discern the striking bigness of the man who shaded his own face while he bade her in a tone of utterly unexpected suavity:

"Good evening, madam."

He was a man well past the prime of life, his hair quite white where it showed behind the concealing hand held over his eyes.

There was, in the way he spoke the words, the note of question as to what service he might render, while his form seemed to be sufficient barrier against any further intrusion of a stranger.

"Good evening," Helen managed to return politely. "I—I—hasn't my friend got

those matches yet? He seems to have forgotten—"

"Your friend?" the elderly man asked in a tone of surprise.

"Yes—the young man who just came in for matches," Helen explained, puzzled at the need of doing so.

"I think you must be mistaken," the man said quite calmly. "No one has been here."

CHAPTER II.

THE EMPTY HOUSE.

"WHY, yes, some one has been here," Helen insisted. "Some one else must have admitted him. He's inside, I am quite certain."

But the man was shaking his head slowly.

"There was no one else to admit him. My wife went to town this afternoon and has not returned. I have been quite alone since three o'clock. No one could have come in without my seeing or hearing him. If you need matches, here are some. You must excuse me; I am trying to do a little very amateur cooking."

He pressed half a dozen matches into her hand. His voice was so convincing that he had time to shut the door, while she, quite baffled to understand his meaning, had half turned away, impelled for the moment, as if by hypnotic influence, to believe that what he said was true.

And then the depth of the lies she had just been told stood clear and frightful before her mind. Morris must be inside. This big old man was detaining him somehow, somewhere—

All her fears for herself fell away. She whirled back to the door, caught its handle, turned it, rattled it, shook it. Then she strove to hurl her weight against the panels, to burst it open.

But its wood seemed not to have shared the general rottenness of the old structure. It resisted her efforts, at all events.

She raised her voice, flinging at the unanswering building one shrill scream after another:

"Morris! Morris! Morris!"

Again and again, shriller and yet shriller, shriek on shriek, she sent into the blackness of the night. For now the house itself had gone completely black, whether because the light had been extinguished or carried to a rear room, she could not tell.

Realizing the futility of her crying she began to shout other words. "Help! Police! Help!" She was on the point of adding the word "murder." The sickening thought that it might be true choked the word back.

And then a gruff voice broke out right beside her:

"Shut up, if you don't want him to go to the electric chair. He's all right. But—"

The voice broke off. Down the street a lantern was shining. Feet were hurrying along the macadam of the road. Voices shouted into the darkness, now that she had stopped her guiding outcry:

"Hello! Hello! Where are you? What is it? Where are you?"

The words were repeated over and over. And the man who had spoken to her seemed to fade from view as he had come, out of an alder bush at the corner of the old house.

But his words had struck a fresh terror into her heart. What had Morris done? Why should he fear the electric chair? The electric chair was for murderers. It could not be—

But she did not answer the shouting voices, though they broke their shouting with silent waits for response. She was in a kind of daze. What hideous thing had happened behind those dilapidated walls?

Nothing in his manner had betrayed the slightest expectation of anything but matches as he left the car to go up to the door of the house. That he should have gone with any criminal purpose was too absurd.

More likely that he had been murdered than that he had slain some other. Almost certainly the warning she had just received was a bluff.

She opened her mouth to cry out an answer to the approaching men, who had now slackened their steps about a hundred yards off and were quite evidently searching the sides of the road for the person who had made the outcry. Then she choked back the sound. A fresh thought had come to her:

Suppose Morris had been attacked—had killed a man in self-defense? It was a supposition which might cover the case. The desperadoes inside might prefer to let him go rather than take chances with investigations of themselves.

But if they were investigated, they would swear the blame was upon him.

It was not a supposition half so likely as

that he was the victim himself of foul play. Yet it was enough to keep her silent while she worked it out.

The men divided, part following one of their number with an electric torch, part keeping with the lantern. She caught sufficient glimpses to convince her that there were not less than six in the party.

They came on quite slowly, pausing to examine every little thicket and bush they passed until—

"Hello—here's the automobile!" one of the men cried. "Some rascal has brought a girl out here and—come on! We'll get him if he's swum the river." His voice faded away in curses such as all honest men feel for the type of criminal the fellow believed for the moment he was tracking.

Four of them strode into the yard and straight up the walk until they came to the taller shrubbery that faced the porch. Helen stood still, swaying a little with the weakness of sheer fright, unable to run, had she even thought of it.

In a moment two of the men had spied her. One of them was a grizzled old fellow, who addressed her gently:

"Well, little girl, what have you been yelling about?"

His voice carried a world of sympathy, of kindly pity.

"I—I—nothing at all," Helen answered, as the men all lined up in front of the apparent object of their quest.

"Where's the—your friend?" one asked. "The man who brought you here in the car?"

"I don't know," she decided to reply with some measure of truth. "I thought he came in here—for some matches to light the lamps. He—he didn't come back, and I got scared."

The men cast doubting glances at each other.

"Don't try to shield him, miss," the old man advised. "We don't intend to do him any harm. Where do you think he went to?"

The faces of the others rather belied his expression of intention.

"I don't know," she repeated. And once more she mentioned his coming for matches. This time one of them raised the question of her veracity.

"Where," he demanded, "did he imagine he was going to find matches in this deserted old house?"

"There was a light in the window when we first came—or it looked as if there were," she hastily corrected.

"She won't tell, poor girl," another one of them decided. "Come on, let's see if we can't find him. Is Bill watching the automobile?"

"Most likely he's inside," a third suggested, himself going up to the door and trying it. "This is locked, but—there's a window with the pane out of it here. It's easy enough to get into the old ruin."

He swung open a blind revealing a broken French window on that side of the door which had been in darkness all the while. Two of the others followed him in.

"Ed, you stay there and watch for him, and holler to Bill if he makes any break to get away," the command came from within the window.

Helen, utterly confused and embarrassed by the interpretation they were putting on the affair, was at a loss for a word of further explanation. Yet she could not take the chance of having them find Morris inside, without herself standing ready to plead for his defense from any violent handling. She, too, clambered through the French window.

"Now," spoke the man who had shown the way, and who seemed to know the premises, "that's the only window he could get in or out of on this floor. There's a back porch. And there's a cellar door that's wide open under that. So, if Mr. McGary there, will just take his stand on that porch, while Jim and I go through the place, we'll pretty near know if he's in it now. Ed's bound to see him if he goes out at the front."

The old man went directly back through the central hall and disappeared into a door at the left, striking a match to guide him as he passed beyond the light from the lantern. The room they had entered was a double parlor or library, quite empty, its whole interior visible at a glance.

They thereupon headed across the hall to the room in which the light had been when Helen first saw the place.

"Don't it smell to you like a lamp had been burning in here?" the one called Jim asked the leader. Then he changed the question and addressed it to Helen: "Did you have a lamp in here?"

But Helen had entered the room in such terror for fear of what she might find that, finding nothing, she could but whisper an affirmative—"That is," she explained, "there was a light in here. I was not in here before."

"Umph!" grunted the inquirer, showing a trace of impatience with the girl's seeming evasions.

She followed them into a dining-room. This, too, was void of any sign of life.

Shuddering, she accompanied the pair into the kitchen. At every instant it seemed something must burst forth from some recess, the old man, or Morris—or—she shuddered again—would it be a corpse, bloody, horrible; would it be Morris's or that of some one he had been at least accused of slaying?

At the cellar entrance she could not refrain from uttering a warning. Only Heaven could know what they would there encounter. And the men, well intentioned enough, were doubtless unarmed.

"Don't go down there," she begged them. "Wait, let me tell you," she added as the leader started on.

"Well?" he said shortly.

"I don't know what you'll run into. When we—Morris—Mr. Ballard and I stopped here—we were looking for a house with a light in order to get some matches for the automobile lamps. There was a light in the window of the front room on this side of the hall—"

She continued the broken narrative to the end. It seemed impossible that Morris could have committed any crime, unless it might be suicide. She hardly suspected him of a mental condition desperate enough for that. Besides, he *had* gone to the door of the house; and the big old man had lied about it.

The two men evidently disbelieved her story.

"Your friend isn't armed, is he?" was the sole question they asked.

"Oh, no," she hastened to assure them. Whereupon they turned their steps down the stairs from kitchen to cellar. And again she forced herself to follow.

It was soon clear that absolutely nothing was down there.

"I guess he's got away all right," the old man said when they had come up again.

The ground fell off at a sharp decline to the river bank, some hundred feet away. There a dilapidated dock indicated what had probably been a boat-landing with a float. All this the men had covered in a minute.

Helen felt unable to go up-stairs with them, which was the next section explored. She went to the front door and opened it while the men held the lantern for her to draw the bolts. She stood in the opening while she listened to the clump of their feet overhead.

"He's hardly in the attic," she heard one say. Then their voices fell to an undertone, and Helen knew their discussion of the case was again uncomplimentary to her.

There was no one in the house but the searchers. The utter, baffling mystery, the fearsome possibilities of horror behind the mystery, the impossibility of making the men believe the improbable truth while they had a seemingly probable explanation for so much as they had seen, the seeming futility of all she might say or do to convince them or to solve the dark problem herself—all this sent her brain reeling in terror, seemed to leave her without the strength to stand erect.

The two men came back from the upper floor. On their faces was written the justifiable disgust of those who are prevented from bringing an evil-doer to his deserts by foolish shielding of him by the injured person.

To the sensitive girl, swaying against the door-jamb, no words could have been more insulting than the tone and accompanying look with which the man who held the lantern up to her face spoke the single, half contemptuous, half accusing syllable, the word which has come to be the only articulation in English for a blank interrogation point:

"Well?"

CHAPTER III.

THE MESSAGE FROM NOWHERE.

HELEN'S brain, made acutely alert by all that had happened, saw that there was nothing she could say to alter the men's view of the situation, nothing she could do to induce them to make further efforts in behalf of her seemingly annihilated lover, nothing, indeed, that she could think of to do for him. So she kept silent.

She was completely shaken, as if she had passed through a long illness. Her hands were cold, she was trembling from head to foot, scarcely able to support herself upright by her grip on the door-post.

It was the old Irishman who broke the tension which bade fair to break her.

"Don't be pesterin' the poor girl," he said gently. "The thing to do is to get her

home to her mother, if she has one. Where do you live, miss?"

His tone might have been that of a kindly grandparent coming upon some lost child whom all other strangers were frightening with their questions.

"East Orange, forty-four Wilmot Terrace," she answered weakly, but readily.

"All right, I guess one of you fellows can handle the car for her, can't you?"

Two or three of them volunteered at once.

"Maybe you know how to handle it yourself, and would rather go home alone," deferentially suggested the white-haired protector.

"No, I don't know anything about it. I've never tried to run it."

The old fellow did not miss the significance of this denial with its implication of having ridden in the car before.

"Do you know the name of the young man—your friend that brought ye here."

"Of course I do. We've been close friends for years. He's employed as an engineer in—the same company of which I'm the vice president's stenographer."

She was not sure of the advisability of giving any of the names.

"And you've been out with him in the car before?"

"Over and over again," she assured him eagerly.

She was impressing him with the truth. She was horrified at what they thought of her; but she cared far more about gaining some further assistance. The necessity of answering questions, the shock of realizing the significance of their words, the awfulness of the whole occurrence had numbed her thus far.

But with every second her faculties were awakening; the horrible, impossible thing was becoming more and more real.

"Then just why did you shriek so tonight?" the old man asked.

And she saw that he no more believed her tale than the others, but was a bit more gentle and kindly in consideration for her feelings, readier than the rest to condone lying under the circumstances as he saw them.

"It was because the old man told me my friend had not been there, and shut and locked the door in my face. Then I knew something had happened to him. Then I screamed until—"

"Aw," disgustedly cried the man with the lantern, "that's the same old story. She doesn't want to tell the truth. We haven't got all night. Who's going to take her home?"

"And leave him here?" Helen gasped.

"But he ain't here," the other retorted, with a short laugh. "We've looked every place there is, haven't we? I've knowed this house since I was a boy, stole apples off the place and played Indian in it and darned near set fire to the hall fifty times. We've looked everywhere."

"The river," she suggested, not because it could account for the disappearance of at least three men she had known to disappear, but because it was the only place left.

"Well, there's a long beach to the river behind this here place. It ain't two feet deep at this tide off what's left of the old float. You'd have to go fifty foot or better before you could find water deep enough to drown a man."

"A boat?" she still persisted, in search of a solution.

The other was still ready to show the impossibility of her suggestion.

"That ain't likely neither," he persisted. "If they was river thieves, making this their hang-out, somebody'd have noticed it. And why'd anybody take the trouble to muffle up his oar-locks and all to kidnap a man who didn't even know hisself that he was coming near that house till he got to it? And why'd they kidnap a man they didn't know? That ain't natural.

"Now, miss, I don't know's I blame you none for not wantin' to tell the whole story. But we ain't got time to stay here; we quit our work when we heard you yell. This isn't no place for you to stay alone. I don't suppose you want to explain things to the police. They'd never believe you and would be more'n likely to let the whole thing get into the papers in a bad light, if they didn't take you to the House of Detention.

"Now, one of us will take the time to run you home in this car, and put the car wherever you say, and we'll just keep our mouths shut about the whole thing."

What was she to do? That muttered warning about the electric chair for her lover still inspired some fear at thought of putting the police in charge of the case. Yet—

"I can't go," she cried. "I can't leave until—"

A sound interrupted her protest—the

short squawk of a mechanical horn. Instantly the idea of remaining in Morris's car or anywhere else about the place became one of horror redoubled.

"There's that taxicab again," she whispered in a voice that betrayed the fear she felt of the thing.

"Huh?" grunted one of the men.

He hurried for the middle of the road, one or two others following. He was the man who had held the torch.

But the cab, coming on at a wonderful speed for its type of car, beat him to the spot. To the waving of the electric torch and the sharp shouts of the men no heed whatever was paid. What struck Helen most was the fact that both street and search lights were turned on full all the way.

With a roar of cut-out exhaust the thing was gone. But it seemed to arouse the man who had tried to intercept it as nothing else had done.

He rushed for Morris's car.

"Something crooked there!" he shouted as he began to turn the crank, "He'd ought to have stopped; and he's got his tail-light cut out so's not to show the number."

But Morris had been economical enough to switch off the spark and cautious enough to remove his spark plug.

"Who's got a nail?" shouted the man who was trying to start the car. But by the time one was found in Ballard's tool-box he shook his head after listening a moment.

"He's got away all right. Say, fellows, that does look kind o' queer, don't it? I don't quite see what this man's had to do with the other fellow's disappearing, since the lady here says they just stopped here by accident. But—a light in the house—this taxi showin' up without any lights—what do you make out of it?"

The appearance of the mysterious taxicab did more to convince the men than all Helen's talking had done. Though its former appearances had hardly seemed integral to the rest of her story, they had been mentioned and were a part of it. The taxicab had no place in their previously conceived theory of what they had seen and heard.

A new search was begun, such a search as Helen herself would have made, excluding from its scope all the places she knew Morris could not have reached, following the bank between the river and the road. The house was once more examined from attic to cellar, and the path to the little broken-down float at the rear.

And the net result of it was exactly nothing, save that there was a spot in the old living-room where the accumulated dust on the bare floor might possibly have been disturbed by a man lying upon it. As was the case with the foot-tracks to be seen all over the place, none was prepared to say surely that this disturbauce could not have been made by the searchers themselves, or at some other time.

At length they stood together on the bank once more. All of them stared down at the black water in which their lights were sufficient to show up the iridescent coloring of floating grease and oil and filth.

None dared utter the fearsome thoughts that grew more fearsome as they gazed into that uncanny ooze.

"But why should they want to kill or kidnap a man they'd never seen before?" one man demanded.

"Or, why should he go with a bunch *he'd* never seen, and leave his lady friend this way?" another wanted to know.

"But, say," one suddenly exclaimed. "We ain't got no right to be fooling with this any more. This is a case for the police—and quick."

"That's right," voiced the sentiment of the others.

They turned from the river instantly. Then—

"What's that?"

More than one of the group felt the prickly sensation of having his hair rise a little. Helen's pale face turned even paler.

It was the squawk of a horn.

She had much ado to keep after them as they raced for the road, determined this time to stop the taxicab at all hazards. One caught up a stout stick, and three of the others armed themselves with formidable-sized rocks.

But this time there was no attempt to speed past. No sooner had the headlights picked out the waiting row of men than the driver throttled down. Before the car had come to a full stop, the door was flung open and a man leaped out. A voice spoke anxiously, fearfully:

"Helen!"

Perhaps there was one voice she would have preferred to hear; none could have surprised her more.

"Father!" she cried, starting toward him. "You?"

With that she burst into hysterical tears of relief.

"Yes," he explained to her and the others, "the Newark Sanatorium called up. Morris had just come out of a little spell of amnesia. They had found him wandering about Woodside and taken him to the sanatorium. And he had come to and remembered leaving you in front of a house along this road, while he went in for matches to light up. He wanted to come right away after you, but the doctor says he isn't able, and must rest up for a few days. So—"

"It must have been tramps, after all," one of the men decided. "They've tapped him on the head. Then, when you started to shout, they beat it in a row-boat they must have had here, took him to the other side and dropped him. No doubt he'll be better able to tell the police something than any one else. Thank God it's no worse."

The mystery seemed cleared at last. One of the men volunteered to run Morris Ballard's car to the garage where he kept it. Helen got into the taxicab.

Thanking the men for their assistance and receiving their promise of further aid if needed, the girl was driven from the scene. The men went home, satisfied that the case was ended so far as concerned them—which it was.

"But," Helen insisted, "we must drive to the sanatorium and see Morris, if possible, before we go home."

They had reached the Clay Street bridge before her father consented to this, and gave the order to the chauffeur.

"The Newark Sanatorium?" the driver repeated after him. "Just where is that?"

"Why, I don't know. Better ask a policeman," said Mr. Rainsford.

They reached Broad Street before they found one.

"I don't know," the officer said, after consulting a little red book. "It must be some private hospital. Then, of course, it isn't necessarily in Newark, just because it's called the Newark Sanatorium. You're sure it isn't the City Hospital?"

"I didn't understand it that way," said Rainsford.

"Well, you'll find a directory over at the Continental Hotel, and if that isn't in the book, the Board of Health can pretty near tell you where it is."

They stopped at the Continental. Mr. Rainsford got out of the car and went inside. Helen, obeying his suggestion, remained in the taxicab.

She thought over the horror of the evening, the seeming insoluble mystery, its apparently simple and almost complete solution.

"Poor Morris," she murmured half aloud. "But," she quoted from the farewell of one of the men who had helped, "thank God it's no worse."

In a few minutes she would be with him, would learn, no doubt, the rest of the story. Nor would she be so reticent in showing her concern. She would do what she could now to make up for the coldness she had so unintentionally shown him before.

She grew impatient to be on the way. Why was her father taking so long?

A panicky fear caught her for an instant. Was her father now to disappear as Morris had done? She laughed at the silly fright she felt; but she could not stand the waiting any longer.

She got out and went into the hotel.

Her father had not disappeared. She had no difficulty in locating the telephone booths and Mr. Rainsford thumbing a directory in the door of one of them.

"What's the matter?" she asked, alarmed by his puzzled look.

"Nothing—I guess," but her father spoke with decided uneasiness. "The Board of Health man doesn't know anything about any Newark Sanatorium. The Newark police have no record of taking up an amnesia victim in Woodside or anywhere else—nor have the police of Belleville or Kearny or Harrison. I'm just going to try Bloomfield and East Orange, though I don't see—"

"Where's another book?" cried the girl in fresh panic. "I'll call one while you call the other."

Half an hour later, having driven half a dozen or more operators nearly frantic by their impatient haste, having called for everything and everybody that could give a clue to the whereabouts of the man they had thought as good as found, father and daughter faced each other at the doors of the booths in which they had stood and ransacked the better part of two counties for information.

Simultaneously their lips framed the net result of their efforts, the word that is adverbial form of goodness sometimes, but now voiced only despair and blank interrogation. It was the same syllable which a

well-meaning man had flung at Helen once before that evening in a tone of exasperated contempt:

"Well?"

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT HAPPENED TO BALLARD.

ALL told, it is doubtful if things would have looked much clearer to Mr. Rainsford and his daughter, had they known exactly what had befallen the lost friend and lover they sought.

After Morris Ballard had stepped down from his runabout for the purpose of securing matches he walked rather slowly across the overgrown lawn toward the ray of light from the window of the old house. It might almost be said that he slouched.

For the moment the joy of life seemed pretty much faded from his existence. Evidently Helen did not care for him. After her last flippant turning of him from his obvious purpose to declare his love, he need hardly humiliate himself by giving her more definite questions to laugh at.

He reached the door, knocked, heard a pleasant "Come in," when it was opened and had followed a man more than half across the hall before he understood that some one else had been expected in his stead.

And now his host, or whoever had welcomed him, was going right on, so that it was necessary to follow on into the room.

He had taken the breath to begin the explanation of his visit, was, in his shy fashion, trying to think of a better off-hand remark to bespeak the mistake that was being made, when the utter bareness of the place succeeded in making itself noticed above the thoughts of his heart. It was about all he was permitted to notice.

The man who had admitted him stepped straight to the wooden table, without a pause of any sort, and blew out the oil lamp standing on it. Before Morris could gasp, he felt strong arms about his neck, was jerked violently forward, a hand was flattened across his mouth and held there, and then he was spun more than half way around. He knew almost nothing of boxing, having put on the big gloves used by practicing amateurs about three times in his life. Instinct, pure and simple, sent his fist as hard as he could drive it at the head of the man who had seized him.

At the moment he thought he had missed, had struck only the fellow's wrist raised to ward the blow. He was surprised at the sickening grunt that seemed to come from the other's throat, as if all breath were being heaved from the body.

The arm that had clasped him relaxed, the figure seemed to crumple in the darkness. Morris wheeled, the instinct of self-preservation entirely controlling his movements, groped an instant, trying to find some object to lead him back to the door by which he had entered the room.

"Frank?" a voice asked sharply—"Frank!" it spoke more in a tone of alarm.

In the moment's struggle Morris had heard no sound of approaching feet; but he heard them bounding into the room now as the voice called the name:

"Frank! What is it? What—"

The light of a match flared up. And Morris saw that two men had entered the room.

One had passed him—a tall, powerful looking man of about fifty. The other was the one who held the flaring match.

"Frank!" the older man repeated, his voice more distressed, and he dropped to his knee beside the crumpled figure.

The other man got the lamp lighted and snapped its hinged chimney into place.

He was a big, strong-looking young fellow. He glanced up from the lighted lamp as Morris turned to renew his attempted flight.

With a leap he now landed on Ballard and bore him to the floor. The older man seemed hardly interested. He had caught the wrist of the prostrate victim of Morris's blow, was trying to raise the man to his feet, while he kept up repeating the name:

"Frank! Frank!"

And Morris suddenly comprehended that the tightening, cool metal on his own wrist was a band of steel. The other wrist was caught before he could jerk it away.

Then the man who had done this faced him over and jerked him to a sitting posture. And Morris, stunned, amazed beyond word or thought, saw as if through a mist of smoke, that the older man was bending over the still form of the one who had first attacked him.

For the moment the old man's act was without significance to Ballard's half paralyzed thinking. He was staring dully at a large, blue scar on the temple of the huddled, crumpled form on the floor. Vaguely

he wondered if he could have hit hard enough to make that scar.

The man of grayed hair lifted his head suddenly from the breast at which he had listened. He lifted an arm that dropped back with a limp thud on the floor. Then, in a voice that seemed frozen with horror until it was no more than a hoarse whisper, he spoke to the other:

"My God! Charley, Frank's dead!"

The sound of that voice with its fearsome message sent a chill of terror through Morris's heart. He felt giddy, sick, faint with the thought of it. The man was dead; he had killed him!

No doubt it is one of the best protections, perhaps the only protection that really protects human life, that it requires tremendous nerve to kill a man. In the heat of desperate, hand-to-hand battles it seems that almost any one can get up the nerve to do it. But most of the real murders are done by men defective, or doped, or both.

Few thoughts could be more horrifying to the average peaceful citizen than the thought of slaying another man. Morris's anger at the attack upon himself sickened and died in him while his stunned brain awoke only to the shock of knowing he had slain the man that lay there.

When his anger came back it was not so much at having been attacked as because the attack had caused him to slay. It was a matter of several seconds for him to muster real anger, as the old man at last turned toward him and cried in a tone of sudden fury:

"You've killed him! *Killed him!* You—"

As the other's eyes came to rest accusingly upon Morris's face the cry of wrath died in a choking gasp. Something in Morris's appearance caused the elderly frame to rock a little; the thin lips of the mouth parted in a gape of consternation; the accusing finger wavered.

"Who the devil are you?" croaked the man.

Perhaps it is as instinctive to duck at an accusation as at any other danger. Morris flinched and choked back the answer.

The old man leaped up, walked closer, his voice raised higher and higher in mounting fury:

"Who are you? What are you doing here? What do you want? What business have you butting in here? You—you—"

He broke off into hoarse, unprintable language. Just for the instant he seemed more utterly aghast that Ballard should be the one who had done the thing than that it had been done. But the man was so beside himself as to act unaccountably in more respects than this.

"What did you come for?" he demanded again. "What did you want? What did you want to kill him for? What's the matter with you? Speak—you—"

And once more he was off in a torrent of abuse utterly profane when it was even articulate, which it was not more than half the time.

"Who sent you here?" he altered the demand. He came closer, his waving arms and fairly foaming lips a vision of wrath that made Morris quail in his manacled helplessness. Then he swung again to the murder charge; he seemed too crazed to give Morris any chance to reply to a word.

"You'll go to the chair for this. You'll go to the chair, if I have to spend the last cent I own to get you there. Oh, you'll get what you deserve all right. What did you want to kill him for? What did you think you'd get, anyhow?"

At last Morris found a second in which to answer. "Perhaps you'll tell me why he blew out the light and jumped on me. I didn't try to kill him; you don't suppose I was going to let him choke me to death, do you? I don't know what you may do to me. I'm darned sure no jury or judge is going to send a man to the chair for striking at a fellow who chokes him in the dark."

"Listen to him, Charley," cried the older man. "I ought to beat his face in for that. He says Frank jumped on him—blew the light out and jumped on him! You lying scoundrel—if that's the best sort of yarn you can tell, you'd better not try to tell any. What would Frank blow the light out for? What would he jump on a man for? Oh, I wish I had you in Arizona about twenty-five years ago. I'd wait to see what a jury would do to you!"

The one called Charley had been taking his own observations of the still form on the floor.

"He's dead all right, colonel. He's struck his head, I reckon," he said simply, though there was an ominous note in his voice and he scowled at Morris in a fearsome fashion. "Shall I go out and call for the police?"

"We can't—not yet. Plenty of time for that. But—"

Instantly Morris saw the point. Since the handcuffs had been so skilfully placed on his wrists he had thought the younger man a detective of some sort. And the older man's indignation had seemed honest. But now—

"Yes," he jeered hotly, "you'll take plenty of time calling the police. And—there's the young lady I came with, blowing the horn to find out why I don't come back with the matches. You're likely to get the police here about as soon as you want them."

The sound of the motor's horn seemed to affect them indeed.

"Quick, Charley, get him into the other room. Tie him up. And then we'll have to get Frank somewhere. Here!—quick!"

The old man pushed open a door at the rear. The younger one raised Morris to his feet with a jerk, and fairly catapulted him through the door into the rear room, where he as hurriedly added another push that cost the helpless prisoner his balance.

Few of us realize the part our hands play in the motions of our feet, or how much we use them in keeping upright when there is any difficulty in standing.

Charley certainly was an expert in trussing up a prisoner. Morris strove to deliver an effectual kick, but the man had a slip-noose over his feet in an instant, and in another had bound another noose over the knees.

The ends were knotted in a simple bow; but the effect was perfect. Any attempt to free his legs would land Morris flat on his back.

"There, you cursed murderer," grunted the burly captor, "I guess that will hold you till we want more of you. Here—cut that out!"

Morris had grown desperate and attempted to yell. Charley took no chances with disobedience. A knot in a handkerchief or some sort of rag was clapped over his mouth and the thing bound behind his head.

"You fool!" the man snarled as he finished this task. "Don't you know where you'll end up with the police? Do you know that you're dealing with Colonel Dave Brink, the Copper King as they call him, with money enough to buy any judge in the country and any jury? Oh—if you want the police, I'll get them for you fast enough."

And Morris Ballard suddenly did not want the police. With all, true and false, that muckraking periodicals have taught us about the officials of our cities, States and nation, it is little wonder that most of us are about as much afraid of the police as if we were real criminals.

And Ballard knew that the powerful man who had bound and gagged him was speaking the truth, though he must needs have heard it to know it.

At one period during his engineering course he had gone in quite specially for mining, with the idea of entering that field. It had been at the time when no one could look through a week's news in the dailies, or a day's issue of any of the mining periodicals without finding some mention of Colonel David Brink.

The photographs that had accompanied many of these articles rose now in Ballard's memory. They left little doubt as to the old man's identity.

They left also a terror for his own predicament such as he had not felt while he divided his thinking between horror at the victim of his blow, the dead man with the dark scar over his temple, and anger at the accusations the older man had been hurling at his head.

He was in a bad plight. If the two men had witnessed the dead one's assault upon him, neither of them had the slightest intention of telling about it. Both of them seemed to have reasons for holding him guilty of a deliberate murder.

And what would his word be against that of the great mining baron? Of course Helen would corroborate his own account of his reason for being in the dilapidated old house; while it could hardly be so easy for Brink to explain why he should be in such a place. Yet it might be much easier than Morris had any possible means of knowing.

And against this one meager fact in his favor stood the terrible fact that there was a dead body, that there were two witnesses to attest that he had been found standing over the slain man but a moment after that man, alive and strong, had left them.

Nor could he possibly conceive of any reasonable ground of Frank's attack upon him. The thought of robbery, which had persisted until now, had to be laid aside in view of the rich man's identity.

Shuddering, he listened to the evident efforts to carry the body out of the room and, it seemed, across the hall. He could

distinguish their grunts as they must be staggering beneath the weight of their dead companion.

Why were they hiding the corpse? Why didn't they give him over to the police?

He listened for what should come next. The two came back, panting and grunting still, loud enough for him to hear them distinctly. He caught a bare murmuring of snatches of what seemed to be a whispered conversation.

He still heard intermittently the blowing of his own car's old-fashioned horn, which he intended to change for an electric one when he installed the new lights.

One of the men shuffled across the room, toward the outer door; the voices were hushed in there. With a fresh qualm, Morris thought the one man had gone out to the girl in the car.

He grew frantic. He drew up his knees toward him, in the hope of loosing the nooses around them. Then, as he lost his balance backward and fell flat, he lay and strove to kick, until he discovered that every effort but served to tighten the clever tying.

"You want to quit that," the older man's voice snapped through the door; "unless you really want to find out just how many volts it would take to finish you."

A moment later the muffled conversation was resumed in the front room, showing that Charley had come back. Morris drew a long breath of relief, when the horn's blast showed that Helen had not been molested.

If she kept that up long, some one would appear to inquire the cause of it. Then there would be help.

Help?

The thought seemed to intensify the black of the darkness around him. Only Heaven could know what help might mean to him, to what fearsome fate it might bring him.

Help? No! He wished from the depths of his soul that Helen would stop blowing that infernal horn.

CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE DARK.

THE sounding of the horn grew more intermittent, as if the girl were wearying of the effort. Then once more it was blended with the sharp bark of a mechanical horn, the swift chugging of a two-cylinder motor rattled faintly to Morris's senses, as if it came to him from underground.

The sound was not loud enough to be certain. He could not tell whether the other car had stopped—then he was sure that it had gone on.

What was happening to Helen? What was she thinking of him? How long would she wait before investigating? Would she call for help, or would she—

With a gasp that brought the knotted rag in his mouth sickeningly against his tongue, he knew she would not call for help. She would come herself.

And then, what would these men do to her? What would they tell her?

Would they take her to the limp corpse across the hall and say it was the victim of her friend's violent hand? Would they accuse him to her? Or would they set upon her and seize her somewhat as they had seized him?

Anything seemed possible. The most impossible had happened, was happening.

Twenty minutes ago nobody in the world could have made him believe he could ever kill a man. Now he had done it. So short a time had taken him from quiet respectability and made him a fugitive.

That was Helen's step! She was coming! He could hear her groping feet on the half-rotted flooring of the porch.

And once more he made a frantic, futile attempt to free himself. Then he lay still and listened.

Her voice—the old man's voice—hers raised a little in protest—the man's insisting on something—Helen speaking again more firmly—Brink still maintaining that same quiet tone in which he had begun to speak—

The outer door shut! Morris lay in agony awaiting the next sound that might indicate whether she were inside or out. The sound came.

His name—Helen shrieking it aloud in terror! Over and over again it shrilled forth into the night. Morris drew all the breath his lungs would hold and yelled. His voice was hardly audible through the thick rag.

Charley suddenly dashed through the room. An instant later the shrieks came to a sudden end. Helpless, his senses reeled then at the thought of the possible significance of that ending of the sound of his sweetheart's voice.

The succeeding events seemed meaning-

less; his brain refused to digest them, to consider their import.

Charley rushed back as hurriedly as he had just gone.

"Come, quick! She's roused the whole neighborhood. They're coming," he said; and then the older man appeared.

"We'll have to take him," Brink said, pausing in the darkness of the room.

Morris felt himself once more lifted to his feet. The younger man supported him on one side, the older one caught him about the waist from the other.

Then they rushed him on into the rear room, let his feet drum unceremoniously down a stairs into a cellar. They crossed this, came to an open entrance, jerked him up four or five steps and half dragged, half carried him down a steep hill toward the river.

The thought that they would throw him into the black water failed to inspire the slightest terror. He had no further capacity for terror. When he felt himself being helped by a third man into the bottom of a boat he experienced no relief.

"The girl will be all right," Brink remarked to him in a voice which indicated unexpected consideration of Morris's feelings with regard to her. "Those fellows will take care of her."

And Morris's brain, with the half-stupefied dullness of an intoxicated person's, comprehended that men were shouting from somewhere on the road; he caught the glimmer of a waving lantern, a flash from an electric torch. Meantime he was set up in the rear of the boat's cockpit.

At another time he might have been interested in that boat. It was a wonderful affair, the very last word in motor boats of what are known as the runabout type. It might almost have been a floating automobile.

The third man stooped and pressed a button. A motor as silent as those of the finest cars made its motion perceptible only as it sent the long, lean craft shooting forward into the darkness.

Save for a gentle hiss of water passing from the bows, the bursting of countless bubbles, their progress might have been that of a silent bird.

And the thing was handled exactly as if it were a motor-car. There was light enough in the open to make it possible for Ballard to see that third man move as he turned a motor-wheel. An automobile could hardly have covered the distance down to the Erie bridge more quickly than the boat did it.

"What's the matter with the running lights, Charley?" Brink's voice broke the silence.

His tone was loud enough to be heard by the man who was standing on the railroad bridge, idly considering the dark craft. Charley, who had taken the forward seat beside the pilot, reached down and pressed a switch on what Morris would have called a dashboard. There was a regular windshield above this.

The running lights gave no illumination to the cockpit occupied by the four men. But the pilot now pushed his spark-lever and throttle up, and the speed of the boat increased to something far beyond that of the swiftest ships. Morris ducked automatically as they shot through the bridge and on.

The boat was no longer silent. Its rush through the water produced a hissing roar. It seemed as if they but skimmed the top of the river. The bend below the Pennsylvania Railroad bridge made the swift craft careen until Morris thought it would upset. But it righted and roared ahead.

In another moment they were racing with one of the tube trains of the Manhattan and Hudson Railroad. The sight of its brilliant lights struck Ballard as some reminder of a far-off past.

That it was but last night when he had been a passenger on just such a train, being hurried homeward with the crowd of other normal men and women, from a slightly belated inspection of one of the Jersey City jobs of the firm for which he worked, seemed unthinkable.

He had killed a man. It had been unintentional, practically accidental, and in self-defense. But it had thrown a dark horror upon him.

And the witnesses were making him a murderer; declared that they would send him to the electric chair; might, no doubt, accomplish their purpose. Helpless, gagged, he was being hurtled over the surface of the foul river, unknowing whither or to what further horror.

Railroad and river separated. They kept away from a big dredge with a vast bucket diving into the black murk under flaring torches. Another bridge, and another—the left bank had receded far, far away to lights that twinkled in homes and shops and

places where men were as he had been and was no more.

He realized that they were in Newark Bay. They churned through another bridge that stretched wide across the two-mile breadth of water, left a lighthouse on their right.

"Now, my young friend," Brink suddenly said to him in an undertone, "I am going to take out that gag. Before I do so, let me remind you that we are probably a mile and a half from the next human being, and it will do you little good to shout—and a whole lot of harm.

"For certain reasons of my own, for the sake of argument as you might say, I'm going to accept your version of the killing back there. This is strictly between ourselves, you understand. If you make a move contrary to my wishes, I'll see that you go to trial for murder and I'll testify to exactly what I saw.

"Maybe the name Dave Brink means something to you and maybe it doesn't. But there are a lot of people in this country to whom it means the potency of forty-three million dollars.

"I may let you go entirely. I haven't thought out what I'll want or what I ought to do about that. But, whether you go free another hour—as free, that is, from the law as you are right now—will depend very much on your behavior and your carrying out of my wishes.

"That body is pretty well hidden now. The man you killed is not widely known or likely to be sought for in a long time. Of course a word from me would set the law on the track of the murderer.

"Now—" As he reached this point, Brink unknotted the handkerchief and jerked it from Morris's face. "Now—we'll be down beside Staten Island in about ten minutes. If you wish, I'll add to the certainty that your friend is taken care of, by stopping off long enough to telephone her parents or any one who could go and get her from where you left her. Just give me their names and their telephone number, please."

Morris had to gulp hard to get his tongue into usable shape again. This sudden turn in the mining-man's attitude was no less surprising than any of the other events of the evening.

Dully, Morris gave the telephone number of Helen's father.

"I'm going to tell them that you've been picked up, a victim of temporary amnesia, and just recovered enough to remember where you left the girl. It may be well for you to remember exactly what line of story they get," said Brink. "Perhaps you can suggest a more plausible story than that to account for your sudden disappearance. I can't."

"You might tell them the truth," Ballard grumbled.

"That we're trying to save you from being arrested as a murderer?" sharply questioned the millionaire.

"No," Morris answered with a sigh.

The truth—oh, heavens!—could anything be true after this horrible night? The very grounds of his belief in his senses' evidence seemed tottering.

Down through what the boatmen on the Bay call the Jack-knife bridge, five minutes more of the incredibly swift motion; then, of a sudden a searchlight was set playing upon the bulky buildings of the Staten Island side of Kill von Kull.

"There!" crisped Brink's voice, and he pointed a big, bony forefinger at a long, low skeleton of a pier.

The engine was slowed; the boat swung in until the fellow called Charley gripped a spile with his hand.

Brink got out with the agility which still made him a remarkable figure amongst younger men, and unhesitatingly started a brisk walk along six-inch, half rotted girders, only partly picked out for him by the light of the search-lamp.

It seemed hopeless to cry out here. The old wharves had been of wide extent, and it was a long way to the road on the opposite side of which dimly showed the colored light of a church-window.

But Morris did not wish to call out. Something about the uncanniness of water at night, of the looming shadows of bulky pierheads and black factories, of the weird incalculableness of distances, served to depress him utterly.

His mind went back to the fact that Helen had laughed at his attempt to speak to her of love. Why, he asked himself, need he care what became of him? The question was but an assertion of the unconscious fact that he had ceased to care.

"He's taking the devil of a while," Charley grunted, after a long wait.

He looked at the illuminated face of his watch.

"Twenty-five after nine," he muttered.

The other made no response. It could scarcely have been more than another five minutes before Brink came picking his way easily over the planks and girders of the old wharves.

"Your friend will be quite all right in a very few minutes, if she has not been already taken care of," he told Ballard reassuringly.

Somehow Morris believed him. The big, iron-looking man seemed perfectly capable of adopting almost any means to gain his own peculiar ends.

"I had the deuce of a time to find a telephone booth," he added suavely.

Of Brink's history Morris had read the bare outline. Born of comfortably-to-do Scotch parents somewhere just outside Newark, he had gone West at an early age, struggled through some rough years, during which he had been married and widowed and left with a daughter who generally received mention in society columns in connection with horse-shows and the larger, less intimate functions of society.

At thirty-eight, Brink had struck the enormously rich Lone Tree Silver mine, in Arizona. He had sold this, and gone into copper, with which useful metal he had managed to double and redouble his already large fortune, until he would have needed two months' services of a small army of clerks to count his personal wealth.

"We may as well take off the hand-cuffs now," Brink said to Charley, as the boat swung once more from the pier, and headed northeast for New York Bay.

Charley got out his key, and unlocked the manacles, while Brink, with a single jerk of an end of the rope, released first one of the nooses and then the other from Ballard's legs.

It was but a sign of the lethargy of misery into which Morris had fallen, that he did no more than shift the hitherto cramped limbs into more endurable positions.

As the motorboat shot up the Bay, and thence into the Hudson, the older man sat pondering a long while. Indeed, they had already passed the long, brilliantly lighted viaduct of Riverside Drive when he again broke the silence.

"I have decided," he said, with that tone of complete authority he had used once or twice before, "that it will be better for both of us that you remain a day or two at my home. I think you already understand the necessity for carrying out my wishes as far as you can. A word from me, and all America could not hide you.

"And remember, I have seen and Charley here has seen only that the light had been blown out and that you were standing over the dead body of my boatswain. Maybe you could escape a murder verdict; maybe you couldn't.

"Once more, for the present, I have reasons for treating you as if I believed your account of the killing. Perhaps I am in doubt myself. Anyhow, I shall treat you as a guest in my home, unless you upset my plans. Have you any other name beside the one you have given me—a first or second name, perhaps?"

"My first name is Reginald," Ballard informed him.

He had never quite forgiven his parents for the teasing he had suffered from that name in his early school-days. He had promptly dropped it, even leaving the initial from his signatures. Never had he passed through a period when he wished to be known as "Reggy." Helen herself had not heard the name.

"You will be Reginald Morris then, while staying with me," announced Brink. "What is your line of business?"

"I am a civil engineer," Morris told him.

"Very good. You have just come East from the Rockies where you have been building some important dams or something. You and I are old friends. I picked you up this evening at a boat-club where I had stopped for gasoline. You had gone out for a fishing trip on the Sally Girl from Coney Island, got sea-sick and been dropped off at your own request at this club dock somewhere this side of Fort Wadsworth. Neither of us has noticed the name of the club or asked for it. Do you understand?"

Morris nodded dully. His brain had been overloaded with surprises, puzzles, mysteries, horrors. Until he could rest it and wake it up again, it seemed hopeless to seek any better way out of his troubles than by tacit obedience to the wishes and commands of the powerful millionaire.

CHAPTER VI.

PRISON DE LUXE.

AS Brink finished they had headed in for the Manhattan shore. It was a dark spot—a little cove in the midst of rocks and trees—toward which they crept slowly at

the last, halting when the bottom of the long, narrow motor-boat grated.

"You take the boat in," Brink told the man at the wheel. "I'll see you at my office in the morning. Here's some money in case you should need it."

The man merely nodded in the darkness. Had he himself been under accusation of the murder charged against Ballard, he could not have kept his hat more closely drawn over his eyes, his head hung deeper down, his lips sealed more tightly.

"Ten-forty," Charley remarked, put the watch back into his pocket, stretched his limbs and yawned.

Then he got out a small electric torch and showed the stepping stones to securer footing than that the boat could reach. He continued to flash it now and then until they reached a wooded path farther up the hill.

Both the men assisted Morris from time to time, as he stumbled over the rough way which seemed perfectly familiar to their feet.

Soon they took a regular road. The place seemed a public park—Morris concluded it must be Fort Washington Park, which he had visited many years before with college chums. Across the Boulevard they started up a steep grade, then turned into a gate through a wall that ran some hundreds of feet down the cliff-like declivity.

Above them, on their right as they had entered, loomed a vast house, a veritable palace. Their way led a few steps across a paved space surrounded by an Italian garden that must have cost a fortune to build on that slope. From this entered a long, rather narrow corridor, through which they made their way after ascending a short flight of stairs. At the end of it they came to an elevator shaft, where Brink pressed a button.

The elevator descended of its own accord apparently. There was no one in it. Morris and Charley preceded the millionaire into the cage. Brink pressed another button inside, and the car rose. They went up past three floors and stopped at a fourth.

"I'll go on up to my room," Charley said, and remained in the elevator.

Brink led Morris across a little hall and threw open a door. A small lamp was turned on by its opening, which showed the way to a wall-switch. With this Brink turned the light on full.

"I hope you'll find this room not too uncomfortable," said the host to his unwilling guest. And Morris beheld a little library such as he would never dare hope to have as the main living-room of any home he could expect to own, furnished in all the luxury one could conceive for an exquisitely appointed den.

Brink rang a bell.

"A man will fix you up with some pajamas and clean underwear for to-morrow. By the way, have you had dinner? Ah—you must be hungry. I'm hungry myself. We'll have eats. The bath-room is right through here—I'll use it after you, if you don't mind. Dirty hole, that old house is. I was born and raised there. Don't believe that place has been swept once since I left it.

"Say, I'm too infernally hungry for any mere snack. Let's have a real bath and some fresh clothes and make 'em feed us a real meal."

The servant entered as Morris protested that nothing could appeal to him less than eating.

"Wane will fix us up something that will give you a hunger," Brink insisted. "And, Wane, have Horton come up here with some fresh clothes—something to fit this gentleman. Mr. Morris is an old friend of mine—I just rescued him from the sea—or from a boat-club that was worse. He'll be stopping here a day or so and as much longer as I can persuade him. Horton will attend to him, eh?"

The servant, whose station was shown only by a rose-colored evening vest, bowed understandingly.

"Yes, sir," he said and vanished as a good servant should.

"Wait a moment, Wane," Brink called after him.

Then he turned to Morris.

"I'll bathe and change in my own rooms. Horton will have the things here for you by the time you're ready for them. Never mind the shave to-night. You look quite clean enough without it."

He hurried out into the corridor, closing the door behind him.

Morris turned to look over the most luxurious quarters of their size he had ever seen. For an instant it seemed to him that the soft leather cushions were calling to him to drop into them and to rest his aching bones and muscles.

Here were quarters in which the most

exquisite might delight to live forever. There was even an outer door opening upon one of the enclosed porches Morris already knew must overlook miles of the noble Hudson.

Drawn curtains revealed a bedroom no less alluring than the library. Beyond this glistened the marble tiles of the bath. As is usual with a man of clean personal habits, who has been compelled to get more or less soiled, the bath held for Morris the strongest lure of all.

He started the faucets running and began to undress. What a dream it all seemed! What would Helen think, could she know he was come to this?

The thought of her stopped his unlacing of his ties. He must try to reassure her. He must see if there were not a telephone in the room.

He went back, casting a swift glance around the roomy bed-chamber.

The telephone was there—on a little table beside the head of the bed. Morris hurried to it, took down the receiver. A quiet man's voice answered.

"Get me three-six-nine-one-o, party-J, Orange," Morris asked.

"One moment, sir," replied the voice.

As Morris stood waiting for the Orange connection he had no real thought of violating any of the injunctions the millionaire had laid upon him. He wanted only to allay the last fear in the mind of the girl he loved still, though he believed then that he had given up all hope of ever winning Helen Rainsford.

He would tell her that he was comfortably fixed in New York, and ask her to inform his employers that he had been taken slightly ill and would be away for a day or two.

"Pardon me, Morris—" Ballard started at the sound of Brink's voice in the receiver. "I really hate to seem rude; but I am still not quite sure that you realize the grave importance of keeping our secret perfectly. Don't say anything so sweet you wouldn't want a third person to hear it, for I'll have to listen in. You are switched through my 'phone, and I'll be obliged to cut you off if you seem to me to be getting on dangerous ground. You'll pardon me, won't you?"

A moment earlier it had seemed to Morris there was little to mind in the surroundings. Every creature comfort was at hand; books galore and no doubt as many more as he might wish to ask for; a splendid view of out-of-doors.

The sound of his captor's voice breaking in upon this effort to converse with Helen Rainsford caused a sudden revulsion amounting to helpless fury. He recognized the luxuries for what they were—the padding of a cell that was no less a cell for being padded. A prisoner with every act watched, every word counted and censored, and limited by the will of another!

He could not, would not stand it. If necessary he would let the law do its worst, send him to the chair for a slaying that had been an accident of self defense. But nothing could induce him to sit supinely here to fatten like a stalled swine because he was too lazy and inert to make an effort at freedom.

He would tell Helen where he was, tell her he was a prisoner—he would say enough of what he had first intended to say, so as to throw Brink off his guard a bit; then he would rush the truth into a single sentence that should be finished before the millionaire could carry out his threat to cut off the connection.

Before he heard Helen's voice on the wire, he had thought out what seemed a peculiarly clever means of getting his message across too quickly for any stopping.

"Is that you, Helen?" he asked when he heard her.

"Oh, Morris!" she cried instantly. "Morris! What happened? Where are you? What's the matter? We've been telephoning everywhere for you. Where are—"

But he had arranged his answers ahead of time.

"Why, I had a funny little spell," he said, in keeping with what Brink had told him of the message sent from Staten Island. "Couldn't seem to remember who I was or where. I wandered off quite a way, I guess. When I came to, I was here.

"I'm all right now. It passed off as suddenly as it came. I'm very comfortably fixed here. I'll stay—"

"Where is it, Morris?" the girl asked, anxious still.

"I don't really know," he said in reply. "I haven't asked any one. But I'll let you know if I'm going to stay here long. I don't see why I shouldn't be out in a couple of days at the most. I'm just as well now as I ever was, only very tired.

"And, Helen, would you tell them at the

office? Tell them I'm not well, you know —no more than that. Tell them I'll be back in a couple of days at the most. Tell them, Helen—"

He paused, to make sure that she should be listening for the next words. At least a part of his pause was due to the fact that his anxiety was choking him.

"Yes?" she said to assure him of her attention.

"Tell them—"

He distinctly heard a click in his ear. He dared not stop to learn whether it meant a broken connection or some shift of switches off the line. He finished with the rush he had planned—"I'm held prisoner in a palace above Fort Washington Park."

He had expected there would be a click then. There was none. He listened for it or Helen's response. There was none.

"Helen!" Few people stop to consider that their own voices are borne to the receiver at their ears when they talk into the transmitter. But any one familiar with the use of a telephone realizes when that sound has ceased.

"Helen!" Morris uttered again more impatiently.

The wire was completely dead. He proved it then by raising and lowering the hook. There was no corresponding click of making and breaking connection in the receiver at his ear.

Brink had carried out his threat at the mere note of anxiety in Morris's voice. And Morris Ballard realized that he was a prisoner indeed.

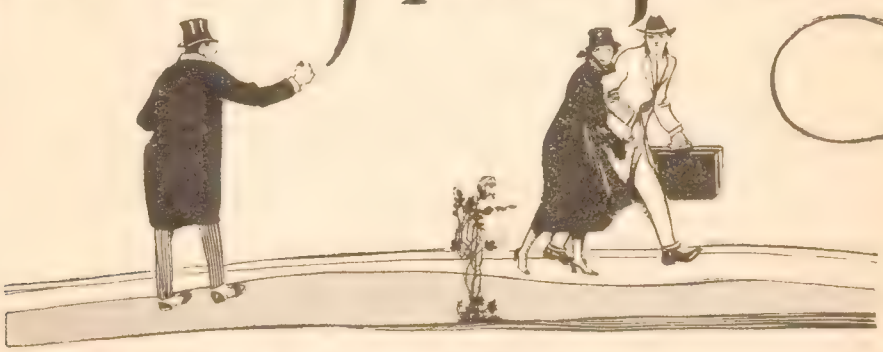
He was not naturally given to losing self-control. But now he vented hopeless, helpless rage by hurling the receiver at the transmitter's mouthpiece, smashing the hard rubber of both to fragments.

"Beg pardon, sir," came the discreet voice of a well-trained servant; "I 'ave clothes, sir, such as they are, sir. Shall I assist you, sir, with the bath?"

Prison de luxe for a fact!

(*To Be Continued.*)

For the Hard Places



By Wilson Clay Missimer

ROMANCE is peculiar. It is no respecter of persons. It attacks clandestinely, subtly, deadlily. Gardener and heiress, milkmaid and prince, governess and millionaire, minister and adventuress, have been known to succumb, fall in love and marry while mankind looks on appalled, wondering at the oddity of human nature.

Still the contrast was not so marked in the case of James Montjoy and Minerva. James had no money, a decidedly commonplace name, no particular social position and was forced to work like a molder for the twenty-five ducats per week which fell into his exchequer as chief clerk in a local freight-house office.

Minerva's people, on the other hand, had wealth, patrician names, social position and did not lift a hand to obtain their share of this world's merchandise. And when these two saw each other, the invisible sprang up between them, Cupid shot his steel tipped projectile straight through them and they did what mortals have done ever since the serpent entertained Adam and Eve on the apples—they loved.

Minerva's parents added zest and excitement to the match by bitterly opposing it from the first. They took Minerva on long trips to force the image of James from her vision, heart and mind; they threw in her path every marriageable Croesus within twenty States, but to no avail.

Cupid is too thorough to be balked by trite schemes of ambitious parents, and the more they protested and laid their Talleyrand plots, the deeper did James and Minerva love each other and the cleverer did they become in laying their plans for trysting.

Came the day presently when Minerva walked into breakfast room of her father's mansion and with nose pointed skyward and the sweetest smile, the holiest look in her lovely eyes announced very casually that she and James had been married the previous night and what, please, were they going to do about it?

Do about it? Bag, trunk, clothes, manicure set, and toilet articles were placed expeditiously on the front piazza and Minerva told to follow them as fast as she could arrange to do so and was further instructed by her irate father never to show her face nor that of her husband in the house again.

Minerva and her mother shed a few tears, fell into each other's arms several times and did a long and tragic farewell, the mother lamenting the terrible mistake that Minerva had made in choosing James for her life's mate. So Minerva left the parental roof, and she and James took a flat and started life together.

You mathematicians figure it out and tell James how he could make things go on twenty-five dollars a week, how he could give Minerva a semblance of the luxury to which she had been accustomed, how he could pay thirty dollars per month flat rent and set a table just one fourth as good as that to which Minerva had been accustomed and how he could begin to clothe her in the way she should have been clothed just to keep the verdict of "shabby" from falling upon her.

Got it figured? Hardly. Pass over six months.

The change has been wrought. They love each other just as they always did but the grim realities have made themselves felt. They know the pinch of frugality—the planning to meet those expenses which they did not figure on when they made the plunge.

Minerva has begun to realize the cost of isolation from parents who pretended to adore her. She does not complain, but James notices the change in her face. Trouble, anxiety, worry and several other emotions are written there.

He realized that few of her patrician friends had followed her in her marriage exile, that she must be lonely. True, he was enough, more than enough—of the masculine genus—but a girl must have feminine companions of her own age about, else she withers and dies.

James saw things at a glance. More economical living on their part was impossible. A maid they must have. He could not ask Minerva to do her own work, to cook, to dust, to bake, to sweep, to clean. But James did the necessary. He applied for a raise.

A married man is the easiest person in the world to whom to refuse more money and James knew the company owned him. And when they advised that at present they could not quite see their way to grant his request, James knew he either had to swallow the refusal or quit, and he realized the latter course was altogether out of the question.

But something had to be done and done quickly. He had one more card to play. Father!

Thus did the prodigal son—turned to father and the fatted calf forthwith departed this life. Thus did James—he went to his father, not in person, but through the medium of good white paper and some blue ink that time turns black.

James was a boy in man's clothes and years. He pleaded his case just as he used to when he asked his fond parent for a couple of dollars to stake him and some girl to the circus.

His father lived three hundred miles away and was a man of moderate means, and to father, as a natural resource, James turned clandestinely. He dared not let Minerva

know he had applied for help. Femininity is queer, especially if linked with pride like Minerva's.

James's letter must have arrived when father's disposition was particularly affable. James had written a good letter, into which he had thrown all of himself.

One could not have told whether he asked for a loan or a gift. At any rate, the letter that went back to him was full of solace, a check for fifty dollars and the news that until James could get himself more firmly established father would contribute the fifty dollars monthly to son's and wife's support. Well, this was something!

Now don't censure James. Don't say he was weak and had no chin. Don't condemn him. He did it for Minerva. And it is something that he had the nerve to write father at all. So whether you believe in the moral or not, don't tell Minerva, because James didn't.

James came home with the fifty in cold cash and announced to Minerva that he had been surprised by a promotion, a raise, and so forth.

From that day Minerva budded out. Trouble, worry, anxiety and the several other emotions were eradicated from her face. She beamed.

She began to set a table that was veritable ambrosia and nectar. She twisted James's money until its elasticity made him marvel. But he asked no questions. Luxuries which he had not dreamed of were added to their modes of living. His eyes were opened by his wife's ability to make things go so far.

Happiness—the real, genuine quality—now came into their lives. Minerva laughed every day and dispelled any qualms of conscience James might have had for thus deceiving her. And then the cataclysm!

A telegram! What beastly things telegrams are, to the sure. No wonder people shun them as they do death. A telegram! James's father had failed in business and the fifty dollars per month, his contribution to James's connubial happiness, would henceforth be missing from the regular mails.

Poor James! He racked his brains. To worry along without means is not near so hard as to have them cut off or curtailed and then have to exist. What was he to do? How was he to account to Minerva for this shortage?

Must they return to their frugality of a half year ago? He shuddered. Fifty dollars a month short. He clenched his fists, gritted his teeth and then finally faced the truth.

Minerva had a dinner fit for a king that night. Soup, fish, roast, potatoes *gratin*, French peas, salad, and a frozen dessert. A maid served the repast. Minerva rippled, bubbled over with seeming good spirits, health and happiness.

And James sat moodily fingering the envelope that reclined in the pocket of his coat, the fatal envelope that was fifty short.

He smiled when she laughed—he could not work himself into her mood. Pshaw, there was nothing to it! He must tell her. The sooner done the better.

He waited till the dinner dishes were cleared away and he was comfortably settled in a chair and Minerva was standing near him.

She looked unusually pretty to-night—just his luck that she should, he thought. What would she say to him? How should he introduce the subject? He mustn't launch into the thing too abruptly for fear of the shock. Tact he needed.

He tossed the salary envelope on the table.

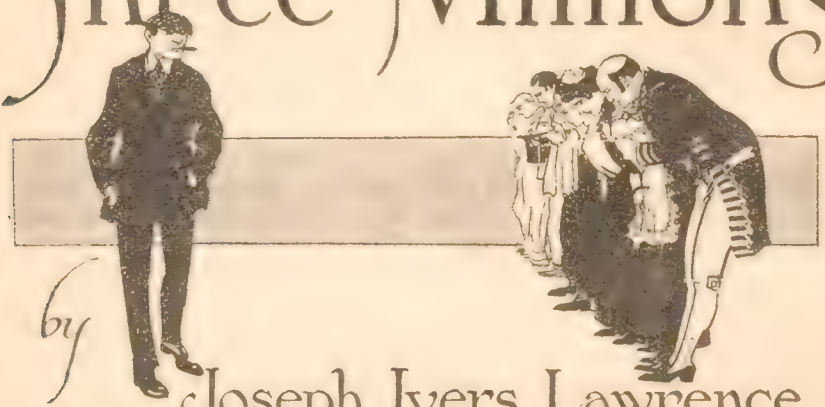
"The monthly stipend, dear," he said, looking away. "It's fifty short. Fact is—" he felt her eyes upon him and he appreciated the serious attention she was according his words. He swallowed and plunged on.

"Fact is—it's always been fifty short—because that promotion I got six months ago was a myth—a lie I invented. My dad—Oh, well, here goes—my dad has been sending us fifty dollars per to help us out—tide us over until my salary should breed more money and—well, the governor telegraphs me to-day that the business has gone under and the fifty will be no more. That's the story. We'll have to exist on the hundred a month—"

He looked up. There was a smile in Minerva's eyes. She crossed to him and put her hand in his and asked him to tell her all about it. He did. When he had finished she laughed right into his face.

"Well, dear, I guess we both swallowed our pride. Six months ago I was reconciled to mother and she has secretly been contributing a hundred dollars a month—to tide us over the hard places."

The Heir to Three Millions



by Joseph Ivers Lawrence

A TWO-PART STORY—PART TWO.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS ALREADY PRINTED.

TOM PENDER, butcher's helper on Eighth Avenue, New York, suddenly finds himself heir to the Massachusetts estate and fortune of his great-uncle, from whom his father had been estranged. Not fitted by training and environment to be "lord of the manor," he might have sold out to Witherbee, his new neighbor, had the latter not shown by his manner that he thought the ex-butcher low bred.

Tom thereupon determines to stick, hires a private secretary, one Howard Ashburton, pays a tailor to show him how to dress, and is getting on fairly well, even winning a bow from his neighbor's niece, Miss Collamore, when the "gang" from New York descends upon the place. Tom, much against his will, entertains them at dinner and promises to keep them overnight if they will leave in the morning; but before the evening is over the town marshal, accompanied by the gloating Witherbee, as one of the county's deputy sheriffs, invades the house and places everybody under arrest for extradition to New York as members of a desperate band of crooks, known as the Bull Pups.

CHAPTER VI.

A THREAT OR TWO.

ROSS, Cafarelli and Mahony were taken back to New York to face the criminal charges under which they had been seized, but Tom Pender was held by the Massachusetts law only, for maintaining a "fence" and a rendezvous for criminals and fugitives from justice. The proud old mansion of the Penders was searched by the police for the loot which it was suspected Tony Ross had turned over to his friend after the burglary in New York, but nothing was found.

At his trial in the old Penderton courthouse Tom found himself confronted by an almost overwhelming array of popular prejudice. To his surprise, however, the witnesses on his side that rallied most stoutly to his defense were his servants, whose loyalty had been to him a matter of much doubt.

The butler, the housekeeper, and three of the younger servants, took the stand and declared him to be a man of good principles; and a fair and kind employer.

Griggs, the butler, deposed vehemently that he had witnessed the arrival of the three men from New York, and that his em-

ployer had been annoyed and angry with them for their intrusion, giving them leave with obvious reluctance to stay in his house until the following morning.

The young housemaid told tearfully but eloquently how her master had defended her from the most boisterous of his guests, and gave the court a graphic picture of Pender's marked distaste for the visitors.

Tom admitted freely that he was acquainted with most of the members of the so-called Bull Pup gang, and even numbered some of them among his friends.

"Will you tell the court," said the prosecutor suavely, "by what social or political process you achieved the distinction of such intimacy?"

"I guess I got to be in right with the gang mostly by arguin' with my two fists," Pender answered naïvely. "That's the way most things are thrashed out around Tenth Avenue, and I most generally had a harder punch with me than any other guy."

The prosecutor observed humorously that the people of Penderton had scarcely been aware of the sojourn among them of a really distinguished "guy with a punch."

Two witnesses brought from New York by Tom's attorney to establish his client's character, came with eager good will: Joyce, the butcher, and one "Stripes" Tinney, a middle-aged gangster.

Mr. Joyce told the court in a voice of megaphonic heartiness that he had been in the meat business in New York for twenty years, and that in all that time he had never known a more fair and square young man than Thomas Pender. It had come as news to him, he said, that his former clerk was a millionaire, but he was mighty glad to hear it, and he offered Penderton his congratulations on the acquisition of a citizen of such sterling worth.

Stripes Tinney, it was brought out by the prosecution, was a man of evil record—a jailbird, gangster, and doubtless a gun-man, and his testimony could not carry much weight. Stripes, however, spoke quietly and told a simple story, and the hearers forgot his record and listened intently, with suspiciously moist eyes.

He told how Tom Pender had taken him up and saved him from the evil influence of the worst members of the Bull Pup gang just after his last release from prison, how he had defended him and kept him going straight since that time. He told of Tom's modestly secret benefactions, performed through the devoted hands of the witness, and he wove a golden aureole of virtue around the head of the prisoner at the bar.

Some quiet merriment was created by the appearance on the stand of Mr. Howard Ashburton. The young man was of sober, clerical appearance, rather austere for one of his years, and he spoke habitually with what is casually known as the Harvard accent.

He stated that he was a student, specializing in the classical languages and in theological subjects; and when he followed with a declaration that he was employed as private secretary by the accused, a roar of laughter swept over the room.

"A sort of social secretary, I suppose?" said the prosecutor, with a smirk.

"I think that might describe the service," replied Ashburton coldly.

The secretary appealed to the Penderton folk, however, as one of their own kind, and his testimony produced a mild sensation. He declared with well-bred vehemence that he regarded his employer as a man of high ethical standards, however crudely expressed; and he desired the world to know that he, Howard Ashburton, esteemed him very highly and infinitely above the traducers who were arrayed against him for purely personal reasons, growing out of social prejudice.

The prosecutor insisted noisily that the failure to find the robber's loot in Pender's house was not conclusive proof of the innocence of the accused, and that the man was notoriously a disgrace and social menace to the community. But Tom was acquitted, because, as he put it: "They simply didn't have anything on me in the show-down."

When he left the court-house, arm in arm with the intrepid and partizan private secretary, and escorted by his attorney, Mr. Joyce, and Stripes Tinney, he headed directly for his waiting motor-car, without a glance at the townspeople staring at him.

But his progress was arrested by Miss Patricia Collamore, who sprang lightly from the Witherbee automobile and came up to him with outstretched hand.

"I shouldn't blame you, Mr. Pender," she said, "if you despised all the people in Penderton, but I want to tell you that I'm very glad that the trial ended in such a triumph for you. I hope that you will have other triumphs, and I'm very sorry that our people are so cruel to any one that is not of their narrow caste."

"Thank you! Thank you, Miss Collamore!" Tom responded huskily. "I appreciate them—those words more'n I can tell you."

The girl hurried away without further conversation, and the men got into their car.

"Say, why couldn't I speak correct to that lady?" Tom blurted, in a towering rage with himself.

"Nervousness—stage fright," answered Ashburton laconically. "You will get over it in time."

They rode home in silence for the most part, and Tom pondered profoundly on Miss Collamore's graciousness, and looked down with gratified pride at his trim black boots, his severely plain dark suit and the dull blue scarf, pinned with a plain pearl, over a heavy silk shirt of creamy white. Whatever else the people in the court-room had thought of him, he reflected, they certainly must have noticed that he was dressed like a man of taste.

At the house the distinguished guy with a punch, the student of classical lore, the lawyer, the butcher and the ex-convict sat down to a bounteous luncheon, and celebrated the victory of the host.

The New York papers, arriving by the evening mail, held a surprise for the party.

Tony Ross and his accomplices had been tried and acquitted. In spite of tangible evidence supplied by detectives in the case, Ross had proved an alibi and turned the laugh on the police. He had explained the alleged flight of himself and his two associates as nothing more than a quiet motor trip to pay a visit to an old friend.

After the ordeal of the trial, Pender had to face another one. The publicity that he had shunned and evaded so successfully came to him with a journalistic rush. New York and Boston newspaper men had taken snapshots of him when he entered and when he left the court-house, and his picture was spread upon front pages and set atop of Sunday supplement articles, with views of his house, the butcher shop where he had worked and the supposed rendezvous of the Bull Pups, in the gas-house district.

He was presented to the world as "The Millionaire Gangster—Scion of New England Puritans, and pal of New York Cutthroats."

"I guess I'm getting real famous now, ain't I?" said Tom, shaking his head regretfully over one of the papers.

Ashburton's secretarial duties became more definitely established after that. The mails brought letters by the peck, all to be opened and read, and some to be answered.

A pickpocket in Chicago begged for a thousand dollars to set him on the road to the simple and virtuous life. A confirmed criminal, just out of Joliet, craftily outlined a plan for a crime syndicate, which, backed with a capital of two millions, could clean up Wall Street and everything but the National treasury.

A prisoner in Leavenworth begged that ten dollars might be sent to his little crippled daughter in an orphan asylum, toward the purchase of certain surgical appliances, and the secretary mailed his employer's check for a hundred dollars.

Pender did not think that the first visit from undesirable members of the gang would be the last—he knew his men too well—and the affair in which Ross had figured as the principal had scarcely blown over when Tod Meagher of unhallowed memory, and Pat Cafarelli appeared at his door, bland and beaming, with all manner of fraternal greetings.

Tom was far from glad to see them, and he did not dissemble for the sake of hospitality. He intimated that he was about to start for Boston on business, and suggested that the object of their visit should be made plain at once.

Meagher, unusually suave and genial, declared that the day of operating games of chance and various illicit enterprises in New York with success was over. He and Cafarelli were advancing in years, and they had decided that it was time to provide themselves with some legitimate means of livelihood.

Pender applauded the decision, but did not thaw.

Meagher went on to say that they had run across an exceptional opportunity to acquire a somewhat extensive picture-play theater, dance hall and restaurant, all under one roof, on Eighth Avenue in Harlem, and with about eight thousand dollars in ready cash they could take over the lease and the fixtures, and operate the resort with every assurance of handsome profits.

"Eight thousand bucks," said Cafarelli, "is quite a piece o' change to a couple o' fellers that ain't got much more'n eight thousand cents between 'em, but I s'pose it looks like a handful of car-fare to you, Tom. The show an' pleasure palace proposition looked blame good ter me and Tod, but Tod

says right off he couldn't never raise that stack of coin. But I says to him: 'We'll go right up an' see Tom Pender about it; Tom is our friend, an' he'll come across without feelin' it, an' be pleased ter do it.' "

Tod Meagher affected an air of humble embarrassment.

"I told 'im that it seemed kind o' like imposin' on friendship," he explained, "and that it wa'n't my style to do a thing like that, but he would come along here an' pull me along with 'im."

Pender regarded them coldly.

"Tod had it doped out nearer right than you did, Pat," he remarked.

"What ye mean, doped out nearer right than me?" demanded Cafarelli with a startled air. "You don't mean yer think we are imposin' on yer?"

"Let's see," murmured Pender slowly, "the last time I saw you, Pat, you acted disorderly in my house here, and ended up by getting me pinched for being a pal of yours, just as neat as though it had been a frame-up. Then, the last time I met Tod I had to beat 'im up, to keep my own self-respect. Now, what I want to know is, where does all this friendship stuff come in so strong?"

"It's always been a rule o' the gang and their friends," said Meagher solemnly, "that bygones is bygones."

"All right, let it go at that," returned Pender. "But just so there won't be any more bygones between us, we won't get any thicker than we have to—'specially to the tune of eight thousand dollars."

"What did I tell yer!" exclaimed Meagher, glaring resentfully at Cafarelli.

"Slip us half o' that, Tom," pleaded Cafarelli, "an' I'll guarantee we'll make some money fer you as well as us. It'll be a good investment for yer."

"I've got pretty near money enough, so I don't have to worry," replied Pender dryly.

"We come all the way up here to see yer when we was broke," whined the man. "I tell yer honestly, it cleaned us both out, gettin' here; we ain't got the price ter get back."

Pender took two ten-dollar notes out of his pocket and handed one to each of the men. "I guess that'll get you home," he said, "and I'm glad to do it; it's cheap."

"I ain't no pan-handler, not fer a minute!" growled Meagher, but lost no time in pocketing the money.

"There's no kind o' need of takin' any offense—any of us," said Cafarelli, trying to be gracefully philosophical in his disappointment. "I ain't sore on a friend because he don't want to loosen up, an' I always liked you, Tom. Let's forget all that's been said an' be jus' as good pals as ever. You've got a fine place here, an' I fer one wouldn't mind stoppin' over a couple of days."

Pender rose from his chair.

"Sorry," he said curtly, "but I'm going away."

"All right; we'll stick around till ye come back," countered the man, with indefatigable complacency.

"Can't be done!" declared Pender firmly. "The—the ladies that work for me are kind of particular what sort of people hang around here. They might quit their jobs."

Meagher got up from his chair, looking ugly.

"You're a bigger feller than me, Tom," he grumbled, "an' you can beat me up same as any overgrown blacksmith can, but I got about through takin' rough stuff from yer. When a feller like me is smaller than some men an' hasn't got a pair of hams for hands, there's a couple o' ways pervided fer 'im to take care of himself. I give yer warnin' now: I'll get you, an' do it right, before I'm more'n a dozen years older."

Pender controlled himself and remembered a certain recent homily of Ashburton upon a gentleman's dignity in the face of annoyance.

"Griggs!" he called sharply, turning his back on the visitors. Then, as the butler appeared with alacrity: "Open the door for these men, Griggs, and see that they leave."

"Step this way, please," ordered the butler, glaring at the undesirables with lofty disapproval, and the two gangsters obeyed, slowly, but without argument.

"You ain't done right, Tom!" Cafarelli called back as he passed through the door, shaking his head regretfully, "an' I'm 'fraid you'll find it out."

CHAPTER VII.

A PRIVATE MATTER.

PENDER averaged two days of every week in Boston, motoring into the city in the morning and returning for dinner at home. Ashburton noted presently that

these trips were assuming a definite regularity, and he was mystified, but not openly curious.

When his employer was absent he pursued his own studies and, for relaxation, rode one of the half-dozen fine horses that were scarcely more than ornamental to the establishment.

"Going riding to-day?" Pender inquired one morning.

"I may, if you can spare me," answered the secretary.

"Sure," said Pender heartily; "and when you send over for the horse, tell them to bring one for me, too. I'll take a ride with you."

The secretary stared, in agreeable surprise.

"Well, well, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "Since when?"

Pender was as pleased as a schoolboy.

"I thought you'd be took—er—taken back a little," he chuckled. "I ain't ready to tackle any big business yet, Ashburton; I mean I'm not ready for it; so I'm using my spare time to polish up on the arts and accomplishments. I sneaked into one o' them riding schools in Boston one day, and I found out I could just about stick on a horse and that was all. Then I found out there was an Italian riding professor had a school up in the Back Bay, and he was the best in the business. I been going to 'im twice a week regular, and I can stick on, now, without holding on to the front of the saddle.

"He has things there like fences, to jump over, and I haven't tried that yet, but I've done most of the other stunts. Say, I can mount from the ground, now, without touchin' the stirrup, an' I can make the horse change from trot to canter with my knees an' heels."

They rode together later in the day, and it was a happy experience for Pender—galloping free and unrestrained over the soft by-roads, across fields and through the shadowy woods. Ashburton complimented him on his seat and style, and Tom was happy; and he made no secret of his boyish pride in his costume of black boots, well-sprung whipcord breeches and Norfolk jacket.

He rode daily after that, when he was at home, often with the secretary and sometimes alone. There was a tall, rangy chestnut hunter in the stable, of good spirit and manners, and he singled it out as his favorite; and horse and master became good friends.

He was riding alone across a field one day, bareheaded, with his white neckcloth flying in the wind, when he met Miss Collamore mounted on a roan polo pony.

It was a great moment for him. He looked at the girl eagerly for the surprise she must surely feel, but she was too tactful to show it.

"Good morning, Mr. Pender," she said cheerily. "What a splendid horse you have! I was watching its gait before I saw that you were the rider. I think that you must have a good hand on the rein, by the mouth action."

"Do you think so?" cried the man, delighted. "Well, I've had about a dozen lessons on mouth action, and I'm trying hard."

The horses were moving past each other, and he pulled his up gently and turned it around. Miss Collamore, not to be ungracious, stopped her mount.

"I'm glad that you're taking up the country sports," she said; "there's such a lot of fun to be had. And a man that makes a serious study of a thing can hardly help doing it very well."

"I'm a regular greenhorn at everything," rejoined Tom, in a sudden burst of confidence. "I never did anything before, Miss Collamore, but work and—and fight. That's the truth. Now I'm trying to get over some of the things I learned while I was workin' an' fightin', and learn a lot of other things. It's not so easy for a grown man to do, either.

"When I was driving a truck 'round New York, four years ago, I used to see swell-looking rich fellers layin' back in their carriages an' autos, and I had no kind o' use for them; I thought it all come easy to them—nothing to do but live soft and spend money. But now, you don't know how I envy and respect those fellers. I've found out they didn't have it so soft; they had to learn a whole bunch of things—how to talk right, how to wear the right clothes, and how to do about a thousand different things right and proper. I'm trying to learn, and it's no merry pipe, believe me!"

His extended speech had excited him, and he had dropped at intervals into the old colloquial accent and manner, in spite of Ashburton's diligent tutoring. The girl was naturally amused, but she was genuinely sympathetic.

"Un-learning is always so much harder than learning," she said simply, "and especially when you have to do them both together. You are studying a great deal, aren't you, Mr. Pender? Your speech has changed so much since you came here, and—"

"Then you really notice it!" Tom exclaimed happily. "Well, I owe it all to that feller Ashburton. He spends about fifteen hours a day trying to keep me from sayin' 'ain't' and droppin' all the d's and g's off from my words. He's only a young feller, but he knows more things than I could learn in a hundred years."

His face was glowing with enthusiasm, and he was secretly marveling at the wondrous sight of the tall, strong, ruddy girl, sitting her horse with the easy grace and abandon of a latter-day valkyrie, when a ringing hail reached their ears from across the field.

Pender looked around nervously, dreading an interruption, and saw Marshall Witherbee cantering up on a bay cob.

The girl's pony was cropping grass, and she pulled up its head and turned it around, seemingly scarcely pleased at the new development.

"I've been looking all over the place for you two," called Witherbee; "I wanted you to ride over to the club with me. There's some polo there this afternoon, and—"

He paused abruptly, as he recognized Pender, and his face flushed with angry surprise.

"Oh, I thought it was Harry Benton with you!" he exclaimed harshly; "I'll apologize to Harry. Is this man annoying you, Patricia? Did he hold you up here?"

"Don't be so absurd!" answered the girl indignantly, and started riding slowly away. "Good-by, Mr. Pender!" she called over her shoulder.

"Confound you!" snapped Witherbee, "you ought to know better than to force yourself on people and impose on their good nature. You can spend your money and get tailors to make you look like a clothing-shop poster, but you couldn't work yourself into decent people's recognition in a lifetime. Miss Collamore has foolish ideas about being gracious and pleasant to clod-hoppers and tramps and all that sort of thing, but I wish you had sense enough to know that she doesn't want you presuming on any acquaintance with her."

Tom's eyes flashed dangerously, but he was thinking hard, debating whether to reach from the saddle and throttle the man or abide by Ashburton's rules of dignity and repression.

"I guess she's gracious to you, all right, isn't she?—to stand for seeing you around every day, and live with you and your family," he remarked with great control.

"You're an insolent whelp!" retorted Witherbee. "You positively spoil the country for me. I can't go out without dreading to meet you. My only hope is that we'll land you in jail—out of the way—as soon as you start some new outrage. I see that you have two of your New York thugs stationed in the village now. I took the precaution to warn the constable and the bank people."

"What do you mean, two of my thugs?" demanded Pender, genuinely surprised.

"One of the gunmen that were caught in the raid on your place is here at the hotel, lounging around and leering at the passers-by," said the other disgustedly, "and he has another—an even worse specimen—with him."

"That's sure too bad!" exclaimed Pender, ironically, "but I didn't know it. It's the first I've heard of it."

"Tell that to the marines!" sneered Witherbee. "You might at least keep them in your own kennel."

He dug the spurs viciously into his horse's flanks and galloped away. Pender sat quietly and watched him out of sight.

"I guess Ashburton will be proud o' me when I tell him about this," he said to himself. "Two of my New York thugs! What do yer think o' that? I wonder, now, if Pat and Tod have been sticking around here all this time, and what for!"

He rode homeward slowly, busy with conflicting thoughts, pleasant and unpleasant, and when he dismounted at the house and handed the horse over to the groom, he found the hard, seamy, but always friendly face of Stripes Tinney at the door to greet him.

"I wa'n't invited ter visit you again so soon, Tom," said the ex-convict, "but I had to come. I'll tell you why."

"Whatever your reason is, Stripes," Pender responded heartily, "I'm right glad to see you—be sure of that!"

They walked into the hall, where Stripes grasped him excitedly by the arm and spoke in a low, tense voice.

"I found out something las' night," he said, "an' I started right off this mornin' to

come an' tell yer. Did you know that Cafarelli an' Tod Meagher were hangin' around here somewheres?"

"Just heard of it—few minutes ago," answered Pender. "I'm going to look into it."

"Well, that ain't all," muttered Stripes. "I might as well tell yer, first as last; the gang is all smashed up, Tom. I tried to keep 'em together and keep 'em straight, but I wa'n't smart enough. Some wants to be decent an' some don't. Well, I got wise las' night, by some quiet info' slipped to me by Meyer David that Tony Ross an' Sam Haas has gone to Boston ter meet Tod and Pat on special business. Ye can make a guess what kind o' business them four mud larks would be up to!"

"Where's 'Phony' Mahony?" inquired Pender eagerly.

"Six months on the Island fer beatin' up a cop, thank fortune!" was the laconic answer.

"Then I guess that keeps the party down to four," said the host.

"It might not mean very much, specially to you, Tom, after all," went on Stripes, "but I wanted to put yer next, an' I'm pretty poor on letter writing. Now, I feel like I done my duty, an' I guess I'll go back home."

"Stay here with me for a while; it'll do you good," suggested Pender. "We have real air and pretty good food up here, and you're welcome as long as you'll stay, Stripes. I might need you to help me get after that bunch and get a line on 'em."

"If yer put it that way, Tom," said the other, "I'll stay as long as yer want me. I don't like ter sponge, but if I'm any use at all I'll be happy to accept yer invitation."

The entertainment of Stripes was no difficult matter. He sat at table with his host and Ashburton, and ate in awed and deferential silence, while he listened to what he characterized as high-class gentlemen's talk. He was sensibly flattered when Ashburton quizzed him on prison conditions, and together they laid out a radical plan of reform over their coffee cups.

In the daytime he was content to wander over the Pender acres, pipe in mouth, and admire the workings of nature and the gardeners, and when he found a peafowl's egg concealed under a hedge he brought it home with more delight than a diamond would have given him in his unregenerate days.

Pender verified the report of the presence of Meagher and Cafarelli in the village, but he did not meet them at close range, and he took no action with regard to them.

He was riding one morning about twelve miles from home, near a town that was easily reached by Penderton people by means of the trolley line, when he pulled up and "breathed" his horse in a quiet stretch of road which passed a neat little white-painted farm cottage.

He had passed it once before and stopped for a moment to dismount and tighten his saddle girths, and on that occasion a prim little old woman had greeted him cheerily from the cottage garden and he had chatted with her briefly. She was a widow, living there alone, and admirably contented with her lot.

Pender scanned the cottage and garden as he rode by, looking for the little old woman, but instead of her he saw another person, at the rear of the garden, in front of the wood-shed, and it was Pat Cafarelli.

His presence in that remote spot was startling enough, but the amazing thing was, that he was industriously sawing wood. Pender recognized him instantly, but as the man raised his head at the sound of the horse's hoofs, he looked quickly away.

Feigning indifference to his surroundings, he casually lighted his pipe, then started up his slowly walking horse and cantered out of sight. He could feel the beady eyes of Cafarelli fixed upon him, but he was sure that the man did not know that he had seen and recognized him, and, for vague reasons, he wanted it that way.

For a poor man to be sawing wood for his dinner or a small wage, was a natural and commendable thing, but for Pat to saw wood, or perform any arduous labor, was in the nature of a phenomenon. It might be, he reflected, that the two gangsters were sorely put to it for funds, and that they were taking advantage of whatever was offered them in the emergency, but there was added mystery in the man's being so far from Penderton, and in a remote and lonesome place.

All things considered, the staggering thing was merely the picture of Pat Cafarelli sawing wood!

Pender continued his musing as he trotted homeward. He wondered if Meagher was still at the hotel in the village, and what he was doing. He was certain of one thing, at any rate: Tod Meagher, "con man," forger

and racing tout, was not employed with saw, sawbuck and woodpile.

As he trotted under the elms and ilex trees up to his door, Griggs hurried out to meet him, more animated than usual.

"Beg pardon, sir—before you send your horse to the stables, Mr. Pender, I've a message for you. A lady 'phoned for you, sir, about half an hour ago, and I took the message. I didn't call Mr. Ashburton, as I thought it might be by way of a private matter."

"A lady!" exclaimed Pender, vastly puzzled.

"Yes, sir. She left the message with me, but she didn't care to leave her name."

Griggs's eyes almost twinkled, and he lowered his voice to a confidential whisper.

"The lady said you would know who she was—that she was going riding, sir, on her polo pony this afternoon, and that for a very particular reason—those were her words, sir—for a very particular reason she would like to meet you near Five Points, on the Duxbury road. She'd be around there, she thought, about four o'clock, and she hoped it would be convenient for you to be there, sir."

"Polo pony!" exclaimed Pender, concealing his surprise and emotion. "Five Points! Why, say, Griggs, that's about nine miles from here, ain't it?"

"Fully that, sir."

"Then I can't use this horse," said the master; "I've ridden him too far already. I tell you, Griggs, you send over this mount and tell them to rush the black right back here, quick. I'll have to do some riding to get there."

"Yes, sir; and I'll go myself and see to it," answered the man, taking the bridle and leading the horse away quickly.

Pender ran into the house and to his room. There he dusted his boots and put on a fresh linen stock and waistcoat. He noted for the first time that he needed a new riding coat, and he frowned with annoyance.

He dodged the incoming Ashburton on the stairs, to save questions and explanations, and was on the terrace again before the fresh horse was led up.

Stripes, coming home from a walk, found him there waiting.

"You've sure got to be a reg'lar bear on this horseback business, Tom," he said. "Ain't seen nothing of our friends from New York, have ye?"

"Yes, I saw Pat—and he was sawing wood for a poor widow woman, Stripes!" was the astonishing answer. "Wait till I get home and I'll tell you more about it."

His mind had been, up to that moment, entirely centered on the telephone message and the only lady whom he knew in that region, regardless of polo ponies. Now, however, the reference to the gangsters brought a new thought.

"I'm blessed if I know what Pat and Tod are sticking around here for!" he exclaimed. "I suppose they're pretty sore at me. I wouldn't put it by 'em, Stripes, to do almost anything to get hep. I may be a fool to take chances with 'em. I guess I'd better keep you or Ashburton posted on where I am an' what I'm doing most of the time.

"I'm going out Duxbury way, now," he added hastily, as Griggs came up with the black horse, "and I think I'll be back for dinner. If I should be too late home to be reasonable, you ask Griggs where I was going, Stripes, and have 'im tell you why I went. Nothing queer about it, but we'll just leave it that way to play safe."

He vaulted into the saddle from the ground and rode away at a fast canter, leaving Stripes Tinney to scowl and shake his head vaguely.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN THE LIGHT WENT OUT.

WHEN Pender, after a ride that winded his mount, approached the junction of three roads that was called Five Points, he saw Patricia Collamore riding toward him. He whipped off his hat, and she bowed, a little coldly, he thought.

"This is a rather unusual proceeding, Mr. Pender," she said, as they came close together; and her tone was positively cold and reproving. "Really I am almost surprised to find myself here. The urgency of your message interested me and—frightened me a little, or I am sure I should not have come. And it was strange that you selected a place as far from both our homes as this, Mr. Pender."

Her brows knitted in fresh perplexity as she saw a look of blank astonishment spread over his face.

"My message!" he exclaimed. "Why, Miss Collamore, I never sent you any message. I got yours and I rode as fast as I could to get here."

She gasped in consternation.

"But I never sent you a message!" she cried. "When I got home from the tennis match at the country club, my maid was quite excited. She said that the gentleman who counted me his only friend in Penderton had 'phoned and left an urgent message for me to meet him at Five Points at four o'clock, and that my happiness and safety depended upon his seeing me and telling me of something that concerned me deeply.

"I was quite angry, Mr. Pender, for maids are more than likely to talk. I had almost decided on ignoring the message, but my curiosity was too much for me. You haven't attempted any practical joke, Mr. Pender?"

"I shouldn't be likely to do such a thing—not in my right mind," he answered gravely. "My butler got a 'phone message he said was from you, Miss Collamore—at least, he said it was from the lady that rode a polo pony, and I knew that meant you. He said you wanted me to meet you here at this time, and you can be sure I didn't hesitate to come. I hadn't any idea what you wanted of me, but I didn't stop to think; I came as fast as I could."

She looked at him long and earnestly.

"I believe you, Mr. Pender," she said, "but it's the strangest affair I ever heard of. I can't think of any one that would be likely to plan such a thing as a joke. My uncle certainly would not, and there's really no one else, I understand, who is interested in you, favorably or unfavorably."

"I'm very sorry you were put to so much trouble, anyway," said Pender regretfully. "I haven't any kind of an idea who could have done it, but I'll try to find out."

The honking of an automobile horn made their horses start and prance restively, and a car swept around the turn of the Duxbury road and stopped with an abrupt jolt near them. There were four people of the country club set in it, and the man at the wheel was Marshall Witherbee.

"I almost passed by you before I recognized you, Patricia," he remarked crossly. "What are you doing here?"

The girl bowed to the other people in the car, then looked at her uncle, quietly defiant and slightly flushed with anger.

"I am talking with Mr. Pender; it's quite obvious," she said pertly.

"Well, you know what I told you about talking to Mr. Pender," Witherbee retorted. "I will see Mr. Pender about it, too, a little later. Now, I must ask you to end your conversation and leave Mr. Pender here! We are going on, to the country club, for dinner, and I wish you would follow us. We'll take a table on the veranda and wait for you."

She still eyed him defiantly, but had no wish to quarrel in the presence of his three companions.

"All right," she said coldly, "I'll join you at the club."

Witherbee started the car and dashed away without looking at Pender again. The two equestrians sat silent and chagrined, and watched him out of sight.

"I think I'll say good-afternoon," she said presently, "and I am sorry that you have been embarrassed in this way."

"Please don't mind about me, Miss Collamore," Pender protested; "I guess you've had the worst time of the two of us. I'm going to look into this thing, and I'll let you know if I find out anything. I hope it's nothing worse than a pretty poor joke. Sha'n't I ride part way with you?"

She shook her head.

"I think I'd better ride alone," she said. "My uncle had the bad taste to humiliate me before those people, and now there is bound to be a certain amount of talk. Not that I am afraid of talk, Mr. Pender; but I don't think it would be quite discreet for me to ride with you now."

She shook hands with him and smiled kindly as she started away, and left him sitting there at the crossroads on his horse.

He was half an hour late to dinner, but Ashburton and Stripes were waiting for him, and before he ate he told them of his adventure, omitting no important details.

"I don't know what to think of it," said Ashburton, "but, by Jove! I wouldn't believe that cad Witherbee altogether incapable of such a piece of humor. He might do it, you know, just to set Miss Collamore against you; he may try to convince her that you really hoaxed her, for a lark."

"Take my opinion fer what it's worth," said Stripes, with a long face: "I have more'n half an idea that Cafarelli and Meagher are up to somethin', not to speak of Sam Haas an' Tony Ross. If I was you, Tom, I'd keep my eye peeled fer breakers ahead. I ain't never felt altogether sure that that raid on you, when the crowd was here, wasn't some kind of a frame-up."

"Well, we'll eat some dinner, anyway," rejoined Pender, and led the way to the table. "If Sam and Tony are trying to pull off something, Stripes, it's a sure bet that they're keeping to the grass and letting Tod and Pat do the heavy work. Tony's nerve is all in his feet, but he's got a grand little head for doping stuff out. Sam is a slick piece o' work, too, and he likes to play the silent partner."

Ashburton was silent for the most part, listening to the talk of the two men who were peculiarly fitted to discuss the psychology of the underworld. They were not through with dinner until nine o'clock, and they sat at the table and smoked for a half hour after the cloth was removed; then they drifted into the library, where they lounged in easy chairs.

It was eleven o'clock and Ashburton was speaking of going to bed, when the doorbell rang. Pender started forward and listened, as one of the maids came up from the basement and went to the door.

"Mr. Pender in?" asked some one, in a booming, authoritative voice.

"I'll have to find out," responded the maid. "Who will I say, sir?"

Pender recognized the voice and called from the library: "Let him in, Katie; I'll see him in here."

The town marshal entered the Pender house for the second time, and stood in the arched doorway of the library, accompanied by two deputy sheriffs.

"Good evening, chief," said Pender pleasantly. "What can we do for you this time?"

The marshal scowled heavily.

"One of the finest young ladies of this town has disappeared," he announced; "Miss Collamore, the niece of Mr. Marshall T. Witherbee, cannot be found, and they've been searching the town for her all the evenin'. The young lady was last seen in your company, Mr. Pender, under suspicious circumstances, and I have a warrant for your arrest; also one for the arrest of this other man here, known as 'Stripes' Tinney, who's a mighty suspicious character."

Tom Pender was on his feet, pale and horror stricken at the news concerning the girl. The room was lighted dimly by a silk-shaded electrolier upon the center table, and he stepped forward and peered curiously at the marshal as the latter finished his announcement.

Suddenly, to the blank amazement of every one there, he caught up a light mahogany chair and crashed it swiftly down upon the lamp, smashing all the incandescent bulbs and throwing the room into velvety darkness.

"Beat it, Stripes!" he yelled, and at the same instant they heard him fling the chair through the large window that gave upon the terrace near the porte-cochère.

The marshal's stentorian roar of rage followed the crashing of shattered glass, but as he blundered through the room, flinging furniture out of his way, an unseen fist found his prominent jaw and landed on it with a force that stretched him on the carpet.

"Get 'em! Kill 'em, if you have to!" he yelled to the deputies, and then what was evidently the same fist caught him in a more vulnerable spot and silenced him.

One of the deputies, groping, stumbling and anathematizing the darkness, at last struck a match and found the wall switch that lighted the ceiling lamps. The room was brightly illuminated in an instant, and since the table lamp went out it had become a scene of wreck and disaster.

The large front window was broken out clearly from the sash, the lace draperies were torn; almost every chair was overturned, and the fragments of the table lamp littered the floor.

Ashburton stood facing the two deputies, gazing in open-mouthed bewilderment at the unconscious marshal on the floor.

Tom Pender and Stripes Tinney were gone.

CHAPTER IX.

WHERE AND WHY?

THE marshal recovered rapidly and got up, injured more in feelings than in body. He conferred excitedly with the deputies, as intent on personal reprisals as he was in the upholding of the law. There was, however, no immediate movement in pursuit of the fugitives.

The marshal suggested that the deputies start out presently to institute a scouring of the countryside, but he warned them that desperate characters like Pender and Tinney would make nothing of shooting them down in the darkness.

"I've got nothing against you, Mr. Ashburton," he said. "I believe you're pretty

well thought of in the town, but I don't see how you can bear to work in a den o' thieves like this."

The private secretary smiled wanly and moved his shoulders in a non-committal shrug. He was staggered by the things that had happened, and puzzled beyond all his powers of reasoning, but down deep in his heart he exulted secretly over the escape of his two friends.

He was certain of their absolute innocence, and he could not imagine why innocent men should flee from the law, but flee they did, and with as spectacular success as he had ever seen staged in a melodrama.

"I'm sure I don't know anything about this business, or understand it at all," he said presently, as he became more collected. "If you men are stopping here for a while, I—I'll get you some cigars if you like."

"Cigars!" snorted the marshal, scenting an affront. "I'm not here to be entertained, young man. Me and my men have some work cut out for us to-night, and I can tell you I expect to land those two crooks before sunrise."

The servants, young and old, were massed in the hall outside, silent but for an occasional subdued whisper, and peering furtively in at the wrecked room and the official intruders.

"You folks out there," said the marshal presently, "you're all hired help, I suppose, and I ain't got anything to do with you at present. You'd better all go to bed and be quiet, and to-morrow some one will tell you what to do.

"Now," he said to the deputies, "we'll go out, but there's no use poking around in the dark for anything; it wouldn't pay. We'll go back to the town and I'll raise a posse to get after those fellers. It's not likely that they'd hide Miss Collamore here, because they wouldn't think it was safe, so we won't stop to search the place to-night. I want those two fellers, and I'm going to send word right away to Boston and Providence to watch all the trains and boats. They're New York crooks, and that's where they'll try to go."

Obedient to the marshal's commands, the servants slunk away, above and below stairs, and the house became very quiet in a very short time.

"I'd like to have all this stuff left just as it is," said the officer, indicating the débris, "until I give permission to have it cleaned up. Good-night, Mr. Ashburton."

The secretary accompanied them to the door and watched them go furtively and gingerly down the drive; then he returned to the library and gazed upon the weird scene with wonder and chagrin.

At the back of the room one of the heavy tapestry window curtains moved, and he started nervously. It moved again, then swung outward, and Tom Pender stepped into view.

"It worked pretty well, didn't it?" he said coolly. "I wouldn't have tried a trick like that if any city bulls were on the job, but you can string these country sleuths almost any old way. Stripes must have laid out the marshal—unless you did, eh?—because I didn't touch 'im; and I'm pretty sure Stripes went through the window. He'd dig for the open, anyway, if he got the chance."

"But what are you going to do, now that you've escaped for the time being?" Ashburton inquired anxiously.

"I'm going to do all I can before they have a chance to get me," was the answer. "I decided that I couldn't spare the time to be locked up, and now I've got half a chance to find out what's happened to Miss Collamore."

Ashburton nodded solemnly.

"I think I begin to see through it, now," he remarked, " and I dare say you're quite right."

"I don't want to drag you in, Ashburton," Pender said deprecatingly, "but if you don't mind, I wish you'd do something for me. I can't show myself or let the servants hear me, and while I keep out of sight, I wish you'd get Meyer David's lunch room, on Columbus Avenue, in New York, on the long distance 'phone. Meyer will be there himself, I believe, and I'd like to have you ask him if Tony Ross is in New York.

"You won't have to say much. Just tell him that Tom Pender wants to get a line on Tony Ross right away. I think he'll tell you what he knows without any trouble."

"All right, I'll do it, but you'd better be careful, Pender. Keep away from the windows and don't make any noise."

Pender smiled.

"I never had to dodge the bulls before in my life," he said proudly, "but I've seen so many other fellers do it, that I know something about the game."

Ashburton went out stealthily to the sound-proof telephone closet in the billiard-room and shut himself in. Pender listened

and heard him open the door several times, obviously to get air, but he was gone a half hour and the waiting man became nervous and impatient.

At last Ashburton crept back with a smile of satisfaction.

"I had plenty of trouble," he whispered, "but I got David himself. He wanted to know who I was and why you didn't phone yourself, and he was blasphemous about it. I think I won his confidence by using a little strong talk myself.

"I told him—I suppose it was dangerous—that you were in trouble with *the bulls*. That's the term, isn't it? That seemed to convince him that I was all right, and he said to tell you that he would come here right away if you need him. He said that Tony Ross was in Boston, staying with Lou Anderton on Harrison Avenue, and that was all he knew about him."

"Cockney Lou!" exclaimed Pender, with satisfaction. "I ought to be able to find him; I know him. Where's Harrison Avenue?"

"It's Boston's Chinatown," was the answer, "just off Washington Street."

"If I can sneak one of my own autos out of the garage, I'm going to take a chance on getting there to-night," said Pender very quietly.

"Leave it to me!" exclaimed the secretary, with unaccustomed spirit. "I'll get the car out for you, and pacify the chauffeur if he's inquisitive. There's a chance that he hasn't even heard of the trouble. And if you want me, Pender, I'll go to Boston with you."

"Do you mean that?" demanded the other quickly. "You're letting yourself in for lots of trouble if things break wrong."

Ashburton's eyes sparkled boyishly.

"I was quite a cut-up when I was a freshman," he said, "but I never saw much real trouble. I guess it's time that I saw a little."

"Come on, then," cried Pender; "you're a good sport, old man. I'm going to sneak up-stairs while you're at the garage. I'll meet you down by the greenhouses and we'll go out by the back road."

Ashburton, stealthy as a sneak thief, got himself a cap, muffler and overcoat, and made haste toward the garage. To his delight, the chauffeur was not even in the building, doubtless being in social conference with the men at the stables.

He selected the open touring-car as the least conspicuous of the three machines, started the motor as quietly as he could, and drove quickly to the rendezvous.

Five minutes later Pender appeared out of the darkness, without making a sound. But, as he seated himself at the wheel, which the secretary, as the less expert driver, relinquished, he uttered a peculiar low whistle—a simple cadence of four notes, the last one drawn out lingeringly.

He repeated the call three times, and then it was answered, faintly, from something of a distance.

"I suppose that's the ritualistic signal of the order of Bull Pups," whispered Ashburton.

"You guess right," answered Pender. "I'm taking lots of chances to-night. That was the right answer, fast enough, but it might be from Tod Meagher just as well as Stripes."

They waited tensely for a moment; then there was a rustle in the shrubbery near them and a low, sibilant whisper.

"That you, Tom?" came like a murmur of the wind.

"Come on, Stripes," Pender whispered back, with a sigh of relief.

A shadow flickered across the drive, and a man bounded nimbly into the rear seat of the car, which glided forward without a second's delay.

"Gee! but it's good to see yer," said Stripes. "I got out the winder without a scratch, but I been layin' in the wet grass ever since an' it ain't good fer rheumatics."

He ceased whispering as he noted the silence of Pender, and not another word was spoken while they slipped over the dark roads toward the city. Near the first town of any size, Pender got out and lighted the lamps.

"They may get us by the license tag," he said, "but we'll trust to luck and we won't go all the way in. As soon as we can get a subway train to Tremont Street, we'll lose the car."

"What's the game?" asked Stripes, with meek curiosity.

"Tony Ross—I want to talk with 'im," answered Pender.

"Oh!" murmured the older man, apparently satisfied.

It was four o'clock when they walked down Harrison Avenue and viewed the garish lights of the all-night Chinese restaurants. They separated and reconnoitred, and it was the keen-eyed Stripes who discovered the cheap lodging-house for men,

with the name of Louis Anderton on the small, obscure sign.

"I'll go in alone," announced Pender. "You stay with Stripes, Ashburton, and he'll know what to do if anything breaks. You'd better keep an eye on the front windows and the roof, Stripes. I'll be back as soon as I can."

He gained entrance to the lodging-house without difficulty, and in a dingy room which served as an office, he found a squat, over-stout, shifty-eyed fellow seated at a desk.

"Hello, Lou!" he said quietly. "Remember me?"

The man squinted at him suspiciously.

"No, I don't," he grumbled.

"Remember Mike the Mut?" persisted Pender.

"He's dead," snarled the man.

"I know," said Tom patiently, "but I'm alive. I'm Tom Pender. I was Mike's running-mate when you was operating in New York."

Anderton got up.

"What you doin' 'ere?" he demanded.

"Just about what you might guess," was the quick answer. "I want to see Tony Ross."

Anderton affected a puzzled air.

"Don't know 'im," he answered.

"Try again," returned Tom, without rancor. "He's here, an' I know it. Do you still hate money the way you used to?" As he said this he laid two twenty-dollar notes in the man's hand.

Anderton pocketed them without emotion.

"What yer want to see 'im for?" he inquired.

"That's between him an' me," said Pender. "I haven't got a gun, so I can't shoot up your place. Be a sport! Take a couple o' chances once in your life."

He produced another bill, like the others, and offered it.

The bill was assimilated without embarrassment.

"All right," growled the man sourly; "I'm an easy goat. Go up to the third floor front—room nineteen."

"Give me a dollar's worth of good cigars," ordered Pender, and while the man turned to the cigar-case he wrote the description and number of the room on a card.

He was smoking a cigar, and when he took one of the new ones and lighted it he stepped casually to the open window and threw out the old one, letting the card flutter out with it.

Anderton guided him to the stairs, and reminded him that he ran a high-class lodging-house, and wanted no sort of trouble in it.

"Don't fret," said Pender reassuringly. "Tony and I are old friends," and he left the man and climbed the two flights of stairs.

There was a light shining through the keyhole and under the door of room nineteen, which was not surprising, as Tony was a night bird. Pender gave the Bull Pup whistle very softly and waited.

A minute passed, then the door swung slowly ajar and the little round head of Ross showed against the light.

"You, Pat?" he whispered.

"No, it's Tom," was the response, and a boot toe was thrust quickly into the opening.

Ross was staggered, but he tried to make his surprise appear an agreeable one. He opened the door meekly enough, and stood aside.

"Who'd 'a' thought o' seein' you here!" he exclaimed. "I don't have many bloomin' millionaires callin' on me. I got in late an' I was jus' goin' ter bed. Sit down, Tom."

Tom sat down on the edge of the shabby iron bed.

"Where's Sam Haas staying?" he inquired conversationally.

"You got me!" responded Tony. "I seen 'im here in Boston, but I don't know where he is."

"Where and why," said Pender, in the same conversational tone, "have you guys got Miss Collamore locked up?"

"Don't know the dame," asserted Tony, lightly, "an' never heard of her gettin' locked up. What about it?"

"Are you holding her for money or is it some mixed-up kind o' game to get me in Dutch?" Pender went on rapidly.

"You got me wrong!" declared Tony; "I don't know what ye're ravin' about now."

"Ever hear o' the third degree?" inquired Pender.

Tony grinned.

"I took it once," he said, wagging his head and making grimaces in awful retrospection.

"All right! Then you know something 'bout what yer goin' ter get now!" Pender shot at him roughly. "Ye're goin' ter tell

me all about what's happened ter Miss Collamore if I have ter beat you up to the human limit."

CHAPTER X.

IN SOLEMN CONCLAVE.

DAWN was throwing shafts of pale light through the narrow window of the Harrison Avenue room and Pender was still there, hurling an incessant torrent of abuse and invective at the man, who still refused to admit that he had any information for him.

Tony Ross had foolishly offered resistance in a physical way, and he lay on the floor, whimpering, with one eye closed and swollen and his apparel badly disarranged. Pender caught him by the collar, lifted him off the floor and slammed him into a chair.

"You tell me all yer know!" he said fiercely, "or I'll keep this up all day, gettin' worse every minute. And if ye lie to me an' give me the wrong dope, I'll get you again an' make you sick o' livin'!"

"I tell yer I don't know nothin'," wailed the victim. "Ye can't get nothin' outer me if ye kill me."

Pender pulled him out of the chair to his feet, seized him by the throat and choked him until he gurgled and gasped for breath. He tried again to defend himself, and one of his hands caught the tormentor a glancing blow on the forehead.

Pender let go his throat and struck him in the face, knocking him back into the chair, where he lay groaning.

"Let up, Tom!" he whimpered. "I can't stan' it; yer killin' me. I ain't in on the game, an' I can't tell what the dope is. Tod an' Sam, they've started fer New York, if ye wanter know that. Maybe the skirt's with 'em; I don' know."

Pender caught him up again, flung him against the wall and held him there, menacing him with an upraised fist.

"Come across better'n that!" he commanded, "or I'll stop yer talkin' altogether!"

He made as though to strike him again, and Tony cringed and wriggled frantically.

"It's the truth!" he declared. "Tod an' Sam took the train fer New York in the evenin'. I guess the skirt was with 'em, all right. They're goin' ter get a big piece o' money outer her rich uncle; that's straight."

Pender let go of him and stepped back.

"I won't hurt yer no more if ye'll give me the whole line o' dope," he said harshly, lapsing naturally into the full tone and color of his early days. "I got to have the whole line o' stuff, an' have it quick. No stallin'!"

"Jus' like I told yer!" declared Tony, "an' I don't know much of anything more. They done it themselves, an' they've gone back ter New York. I saw 'em off on the train myself."

Pender seized him with both hands and shook him till his teeth rattled.

"Yer fallin' over yer lies!" he cried. "You jus' said you couldn't tell if the lady was with 'em. Come to, now!"

"Sure she was, if yer got to know it!" groaned the man. "But it's all Tod's work; I didn't have nothin' ter do with it. Tod an' Pat an' Sam fixed it up. They figger you'll get pinched for the job; they got it framed on yer."

"That's the truth, anyhow," said Pender; "you didn't need ter tell me that. Where they goin' in New York?"

"I don't know; they didn't tell me," Tony whined. "They ain't goin' to give up the girl till her rich uncle comes across with fifty thousand, cash. They've let 'im know that, an' he'll have ter come across, all right, if he wants to see 'er again. You ought to know, as well as me, where they'd take her to. Get after 'em, why don't yer? What d'yer pick me out fer, to take all the beatin' up?"

"You're the little man I wanted to get," answered Pender. "You're the only guy in the bunch with brains enough to frame up a lay like that, an' you're the only guy without nerve enough to back it up. I knew that I could break yer if I got my hands on yer. Now, if you've told me straight stuff, we'll start something. Where's Pat Cafarelli."

"I s'pose he's layin' off round here somewhere," said Tony, "so's to 'tend to the business end o' the game. Tod an' Sam went on the train, I tell yer, an' I don't know nothin' about where Pat is."

"I want to know something about how I come in so strong on all this business," said Pender. "What does Tod an' all the rest of 'em think they're goin' to get outer me?"

"Tod's pretty sore on you," answered the man meekly. "He's been sayin' all along he was goin' to get you good. Gee!

but you're a hard guy, Tom! You done enough to Tod to make any feller sore, an' you'd better watch out for 'im. If he don't get you this time, he'll sure frame up somethin' on yer that'll send you up fer a good bit. He's a bad guy to have after yer, all right!"

"Thanks for the tip," said Pender ironically. "I reckon I'll keep my eyes open—for you, too! There's a heap of good fellers in the Bull Pups—fellers I'm proud to know; but you and Tod, and your bunch, you're the worst lot o' graftin', low-down wharf rats on the West Side!"

He started and grew alert as a step sounded softly on the stair outside, and Ross pricked up his ears.

The whistle of the gang sounded faintly outside the door.

"See here!" Pender whispered sternly, "if that's Pat Cafarelli, or any one like that, an' you start anything, it'll be the worst thing for you that ever happened. It may be Stripes, to see me, and then again it may not."

He stepped back and faced the door, then answered the whistle in the customary way.

The door-knob rattled and turned, the door opened, and Tod Meagher stepped boldly into the room, followed by Sam Haas and two other men.

With a cry of rage and consternation Pender sprang back and seized a light chair, raising it over his shoulder for use as a weapon.

"You damned little rat!" he cried, glaring at Ross, "you lied to me, after all!"

At that instant his glance fell upon the two men behind Sam Haas. They had stepped across the threshold, then dodged quickly back into the dark hall as they perceived that something was wrong in the room, but they were too late to escape notice.

"Come right in, Mr. Witherbee!" Tom called out. "Don't be bashful. And you, too, *Mr. Pender*. Though we're cousins, I never met you before, but my lawyer pointed you out to me on Tremont Street one day. Come in, everybody. Let's have a reg'lar party."

"You shut your mouth, and drop that chair!" ordered Sam Haas, as he whipped an automatic from his pocket and covered Tom. "We've got you right, now, and you forget all about these two gentlemen with us and don't mention their names again, or when you go outer this room it'll be feet first. Get me?"

Tom was pale and he quivered slightly with excitement as he stood facing the five men, but his manner was cool and sneering.

"Thanks for putting me right on the two *gentlemen*," he said. "I take it from that, that they're in on the deal, somehow."

Marshall Witherbee strode nervously into the room, and Sam Pender followed him, closing the door and locking it.

"Let's have no more of this nonsense, here," said Witherbee. "Put up that pistol, Mr. Haas; and you, Pender, drop that chair!

"I'm not surprised to see you here, in a crook's den," he continued, scowling at Tom, "but I am surprised that the thieves have apparently fallen out. These men are holding my niece for ransom, and to keep her from any harm I have weakly met them half way and agreed to a settlement. They say that you planned the kidnaping, Pender, but they are willing to give you up to the police and return my niece to her home if I will pay them a hundred thousand dollars."

"The price has gone up," observed Tom dryly. "A few minutes ago it was fifty thousand. And, by the way, what has Mr. Samuel Pender got to do with it? Where does he come in?"

"I didn't care to come to this place alone," explained Witherbee. "Mr. Samuel Pender is here with me as my friend."

"And also to see if he can get anything on me," put in Tom, "so's to make out half a case against me in the will contest. Is that it?"

Then, while every one stood silent, uncomfortable and undecided as to the next move, Tom tried an experiment with an ancient ruse, employed thousands of times with success by detectives and lawyers.

"This would all shape up pretty well," he said; "I might believe your story, Mr. Witherbee, if Tony Ross hadn't blown the whole game before you got here. Look at 'im! It took about six hours of the third degree to get it out of him, but I got it."

"My God!" cried Witherbee, turning a ghastly yellow.

"He lies!" broke out Tony. "I ain't—"

"Put up your hands, Tom!" interrupted Sam Haas fiercely, bringing the automatic again into play. "You've cooked your own goose. If you've got any info' outer Tony, that settles you!"

"Great Heavens! we can't have any shooting here!" groaned Witherbee. "We must settle this thing some other way. Put away that gun, Mr. Haas!"

He took hold of the arm that held the pistol and strove to calm Haas and reason with him, and while he created the diversion, Tom Pender played another card.

Like a flash his hand darted to the table in front of him and seized the heavy brass receptacle for matches and ashes, and before any of the others could move to restrain him, he hurled it through the window glass, into the street.

There was a chorus of startled cries. Haas struggled with the frightened Witherbee and strove to point the pistol at Tom, and at last Witherbee was overpowered and flung aside.

"Now put up them hands!" snarled Haas, and Tom obeyed.

"What has he done?" gasped Samuel Pender. "What did he throw that through the window for."

Tod Meagher laughed harshly.

"Jus' to hit a cop in the head, an' scare 'im so's he'll come up here," he answered. "But don't worry; the cops ain't lookin' fer trouble."

"Stop lookin' so lovin'ly at that window, Tom!" growled Haas. "That fire-escape won't do you no good. I could put five pills into you before you got both feet on it."

"We must settle this affair some way, men!" declared Witherbee frantically. "What do you want, Pender? Mr. Samuel Pender and I have innocently got ourselves into a scandalous mess, and we must get out of it. What can we do to keep this thing quiet?"

Tom, holding his hands in the air, smiled sourly.

"That's a hard question to answer, Mr. Witherbee," he said. "You can't very well bribe a feller that's worth three million dollars, can you?"

"There won't be no bribes in this game!" blurted Tod Meagher. "We've got Tom Pender where we've been tryin' to get 'im for a long time. It'll take somethin' more than his three million to get 'im out o' this!"

"He's got to pay fer beatin' me up fer six hours!" bleated Tony Ross childishly. "I ain't no butcher or blacksmith, an' I—"

A startling thud and a crash interrupted him, and the door fell in, splintered and torn from its hinges and lock by a heavy chair, wielded as a battering-ram by Stripes Tinney.

Sam Haas turned and fired a shot at random, but before he could fire again he was blinded and sent into paroxysms of pain by a shower of some strange, evil-smelling, stinging fluid.

"Please don't attempt any resistance, gentlemen," said Howard Ashburton, excitedly, but with grave dignity, and he advanced upon the enemy with a huge brass fire extinguisher in his arms, and proceeded to spray the corrosive chemical contents impartially into the faces of Haas, Ross, Meagher, Witherbee and Samuel Pender.

Tom Pender uttered a ringing laugh at the ridiculous, but highly effective results of the attack, and he waited for no further developments.

"Meet me in Penderton, Ashburton!" he cried; "you and Stripes!" Then he sprang to the window, flung up the broken sash and disappeared down the fire-escape.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE WOODPILE.

TOM PENDER was bareheaded and he looked far from cool and collected as he walked along Harrison Avenue at a pace not quite fast enough to arouse suspicion. He reached Washington Street by alleys and short cuts, and jumped into a taxicab.

Under his direction the chauffeur drove at the speed limit to Sullivan Square, where Tom dismissed him. He knew of a small garage there, where he had stopped for gasoline, and in five minutes he had chartered a car and was speeding over the Old Colony roads toward Plymouth County, his mind fixed intently on an impulse which had been growing within him since the arrival of the four men in the Harrison Avenue room had proved Tony Ross's information false.

The chauffeur, with promises of fair reward, drove the car thirty miles in fifty minutes, somewhat puzzled by the course that Tom pointed out to him. The car was stopped suddenly on a lonely road in the midst of thick woods, where Tom got out and paid the man his fare and the promised tip.

"Don't you want to go no further?" asked the chauffeur, in surprise. "This is a queer place to get out; there ain't a house in sight!"

"I do lots of queer things," answered Tom shortly, and walked directly into the woods, leaving the chauffeur staring blankly after him.

He took a circuitous route through the woods and in five minutes arrived at the rear of an ancient and dilapidated barn. He entered the barn and stole cautiously through it, and came presently to an open wing on the north side of the structure which served as a woodshed.

There was a pile of logs under the shed and some recently split kindlings, and Tom smiled whimsically as he regarded the handiwork of the amateur woodchopper, Pat Cafarelli.

The tools of the craft were arrayed beside the chopping block, and he took up a strong, heavy ax, and without an instant's hesitation strode out of the shed and marched boldly to the side door of the trim little white cottage.

Standing close against the door, he could not be seen from the windows, and he flattened himself against the panels and knocked sharply.

Not a sound answered him, and he knocked again after a brief interval. The house remained as silent and unresponsive as a deserted dwelling.

"All right," he said to himself; "now for it! sink or swim!"

He stepped back quickly, swung the ax with all the strength of both arms, and sent it crashing into the door near the lock. The dry wood split, and the door cracked from threshold to lintel.

He reversed the ax and threw his whole weight into a blow that freed the door from its fastenings and burst in inward.

A revolver shot crashed out from the dim interior, and Tom felt the breath of a bullet close to his cheek. He saw Pat Cafarelli standing in the hallway, and he hurled the ax at him.

It struck the gangster in the midriff and doubled him up on the floor, and the next instant the two men were floundering in a mad struggle for the revolver. With two hands gripping it convulsively, it went off again with a deafening roar in the narrow passage, and Cafarelli screamed in agony.

"I'm hit!" he yelled, and his muscles relaxed.

"Good!" panted Tom, and wrenched the gun from him. "Now, where's Miss Collamore, and where's the old lady that was here?"

"In there," groaned the gangster, nodding toward a closed door, and clasping his hands around his wounded leg.

Tom tried the door and found it locked. The ax opened it, and in the small room, with its one window boarded up, two women were cowering in pitiful terror; Patricia Collamore and the old lady of the cottage.

Tom's courage and initiative ebbed for the first time.

"I—I'm sorry I had to be so—such a rough-neck about it, Miss Collamore," he faltered, "but it had to be done. I've been beating up men and smashing windows an' things for the last twelve hours. I—I guess I've got the habit."

The girl was white with panic, and she could hardly find her voice.

"Are the—the police here?" she gasped. "Are we—all right—safe, now?"

"The police aren't here, so I guess you're safe," answered Pender, then whirled about and flashed the revolver as he perceived Cafarelli was crawling stealthily toward the door.

"Quit that, Pat!" he said sharply. "You're all through. I've got all the rest of the crowd in Boston, and you're the last. You had a nice little game doped out, Pat, but Tony squealed."

A torrent of shocking, blighting profanity poured from the mouth of the gangster, and the immortal soul of Tony Ross was commended to the unexplored and arid deserts of the nether world.

"And we got Witherbee and my cousin, Samuel Pender, too," continued Tom, trying the ancient ruse again. "They were greenhorns, so they gave up without any trouble."

Cafarelli, fairly frothing at the mouth, added a diabolical mass for the souls of the two men last named, and he described the class of fools to which he thought Tod Meagher and Sam Haas belonged.

"I told 'em!" he snarled. "I told Tod that when he took a couple o' classy gents into a deal, he was headed straight for the pen."

Tom played his fish with a taut line.

"And they didn't mean to treat you on the square, either, Pat," he said. "They told little Tony that the ransom was to be fifty thousand, and later on Witherbee admitted that he had agreed to a hundred thousand."

Pat's flow of vivid expression was now more staggering than before, but Tom dared

not check him for the sake of the women; his state of mind was too helpful to the cause to be trifled with.

"I knowed it would be like that!" he fumed. "Damn 'em; they didn't even let on about the fifty thousand to me! I had to help get the girl, an' then keep her cooped up here, after I had the old woman fixed so she gave me the run o' the house, an' I—I was only goin' ter get a thousand out o' the whole game.

"That smooth guy, Witherbee, told me we could ask fer ten thousand, and that he'd split up five amongst us, and the rest would be fifty-fifty between him an' your cousin. Then we was to frame you on the job, get you sent up fer twenty years, an' your cousin was to have a merry pipe breakin' the will an' takin' everything away from you. A hundred thousand, was it? Well, I reckon Tod Meagher wasn't goin' ter lose out by it! I'll get that fat-head, an' Sam Haas with 'im, if it takes me the rest o' my life.

"I'm glad you won out, at that, Tom!" he added, in an excess of feeling. "You've handed it ter me pretty hard, now an' other times, but that ain't sayin' you don't play square."

"What I can't understand," said Tom coolly, following up his lead, "is what was back of the game. Witherbee was paying the ransom, yet he was coming in for his share of it. How can a feller cop out money from his own bank roll?"

Patricia Collamore spoke, and her voice was so cold and steady that Tom Pender whirled about, half startled.

"I'm almost sorry to say that I can solve the riddle for you, Mr. Pender," she said bitterly. "My uncle is a society man of some position, but he is a hard drinker and a confirmed gambler; and now we know that he is a contemptible rascal. Before he was appointed my guardian he was not very wealthy. Since I was ten years old, however, he has managed my estate and conducted the business that my father left to me.

"You may imagine now how he has conducted it. I have had my eyes opened lately, and when I have asked for definite accountings of his administration he has been politely evasive. I believe he is deeply in debt, and this plot is doubtless a result of his recent intimacy with Mr. Samuel Pender—a man for whom I never had any respect."

"Who kidnaped you, Miss Collamore?" asked Tom tensely.

"Three men I never saw before," she answered. "I had been riding for perhaps ten minutes, after I left you that day, when an automobile stopped directly in front of me and blocked the road. I was taken off my pony and thrown into the car. I fainted, I think, and when I came back to my senses I was locked in this room, with this poor old lady, who was more terrified than I was. This man had worked for her and won her confidence, and then threatened her with death if she attempted to interfere with his plans.

"My uncle," she continued, her voice growing harder, "planned, of course, to pay the ransom out of my own money. You can see it all very clearly now, Mr. Pender."

Tom nodded slowly.

"I'm awful sorry for you, Miss Collamore," he said simply.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE MORNING.

TOD MEAGHER, Sam Haas, Tony Ross and Pat Cafarelli did not return to their old Tenth Avenue hunting grounds, for they were detained for a lengthy period in an institution of correction at a place called Charlestown. They were by no means isolated from their fellow men, however, as they were members of a vast and varied company, which included persons as distinguished as Mr. Marshall Witherbee and Mr. Samuel Pender.

The trial at which six men were convicted of conspiracy and abduction was the most sensational event which had ever disturbed the serenity of ancient Penderton. The town was jarred to its venerable foundations and its pride was sorely hurt. Two of its precious traditional names were dragged in the dust, and the community in general was crushed beneath a weight of humiliation and disgrace.

There was, however, in the psychological development of things, a marked reaction in the popular attitude toward Tom Pender. He was the hero of the trial, with Howard Ashburton a close second. Doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs, stopped Tom in the street to shake his hand, and men whom he had never met came to him and told him that old Ellery Pender had chosen his heir and successor wisely.

The sudden attention, amounting almost to adulation, was too much for him at last, and he sought the counsel of his now inseparable companion, Ashburton. The latter, who was by that time weary of hearing nothing but narrations of his gallant artillery attack with the fire extinguisher, recommended a trip to foreign climes, for rest and improvement of the mind, and Tom became a traveler, while Stripes Tinney was left blissfully in charge of the Pender estate.

Something over a year later, Patricia Collamore came out of the picturesque old Penderton church one Sunday morning and was about to enter her waiting motor-car when the sight of two men approaching arrested her. There was something vaguely familiar about them that drew her attention, but for a moment their identity was puzzling.

They were dressed a little more smartly, if anything, than the men of Penderton, and their appearance was conspicuously distinguished.

"How do you do, Miss Collamore!" exclaimed the man with the mustache and pointed beard. "You will welcome Ashburton and me home, if no one else recognizes us, won't you?"

"Why, it's Mr. Pender!" cried the girl, with impulsive gladness, giving him her hand. "But how a year has changed you! and you, too, Mr. Ashburton! You've been traveling all the time, haven't you?"

"We've been everywhere—almost!" said Tom, with boyish ardor. "We have done Japan and China, Australia, and a thousand places."

"I have often wondered where you were," said Patricia simply. "You might have written, now and then, to your friends."

Tom smiled brightly and flushed a little, but there was none of the old helpless confusion in his manner.

"I wanted to write to you, Miss Collamore," he said, "but you didn't ask me to, you know; and I *never* meant to force myself upon anybody."

She laughed away the growing embarrassment.

"You and Mr. Ashburton must come and have tea with me this afternoon," she said lightly, "and then we will get acquainted all over again. You see, I thought you might be quite tired of Penderton and its people, after all that happened."

Tom shook his head soberly.

"You know I vowed once that I would *stick*," he said, "and I have come back, now, to stay. I am glad to get home, too. I am Pender of Penderton, and I want to live up to the title."

"And I believe," she exclaimed, with a sudden blush, "that you're the best of the lot!"

THE END.

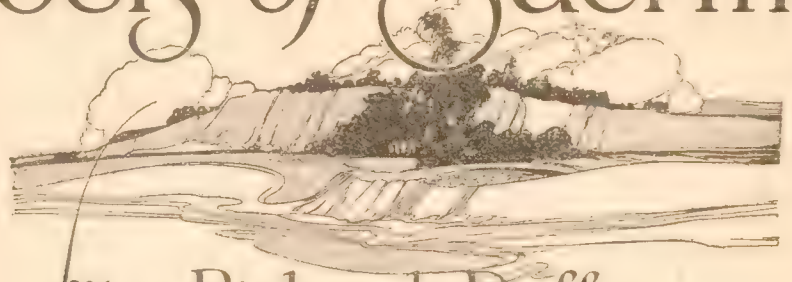
THE COST

PRINCELY he seemed when riding up,
Noble and brave in his rich array,
His plea the truth in a maiden's eyes,
His prayer to drink of a maiden's eyes,
His pledge to drink and stay!
But the first sip won proved a stirrup-cup:
His golden vows were gilded lies!
My Prince of Dreams came riding up,
Only to ride away.

A knave! So this was the boon of Fate!
Yet there in the dust where our pathways crossed,
Prudence was born to a maiden's heart,
Womanhood bloomed in a maiden's heart:
Amends for an idol lost!
Smiling I sped him from the gate;
Dry-eyed, I watched my Prince depart;
Nor wept when left alone with Fate:
But oh the Dreams it cost!

Richard Butler Glaenzer.

Fools of Sacrifice



by Richard Duffy

A THREE-PART STORY—PART THREE.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS ALREADY PRINTED.

CAST away upon Big Twin Island, in the Caribbean, Stephen Weir, *alias* H. A. Danforth, becomes blindly involved in a mutiny of the plantation blacks against the owner, Captain Neville. Circumstances make it appear as if he were one of the leaders of the revolt—the other moving spirits being the overseer, William Ransom; Ransom's satellite, Black Henry; the clerks, Jake Haas and Sailor Pete; and the voodoo seeress, Mother Juliet. Black Henry has been thrown into chains by Michael Sands, Captain Neville's right-hand man, and prematurely rescued. While his friends were freeing him Ransom attacked Captain Neville and was shot by Sands, who hid the overseer's body underneath a window-seat in the great hall of Neville's house. Sands takes the captain up-stairs, and is returning for his employer's daughter, Miss Susan, when he first confronts Weir. Sands drew on the stranger.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ORGY.

BEFORE Michael could fire—if indeed he had intended so to do—three rifle-shots sounded in swift succession from that side of Captain Neville's hall which fronted on the court garden.

A whole company of rifle-butts burst through the high French windows, and ten thousand bits of glass crashed inward on the floor from the leaded panes.

"The row's broke loose!" Michael gasped.

A sea of black heads and faces showed through the shattered windows. Pointing his revolver, Michael backed up the stairs to the women's apartment, with Susan Neville hanging a dead weight across his arm.

As soon as they took their hands off him Stephen Weir stood up, clutching a rifle, which in the excitement had been left lying on the billiard table. The blood left his cheeks when he saw the blacks, each one armed, crowd into the hall from all sides. He did not need to think to understand how defenseless he was before this sullen mob, that uttered no word yet looked everywhere with curiosity and wariness.

Weir they eyed mercilessly. He held his nerve, yet was almost sorry now that he had secured the rifle. It could only serve as a goad to them if they were ill disposed. He would not have been greatly surprised if he had been shot in the back.

Presently one of the men whispered.

Other men were entering at the windows. Weir saw Jake Haas, Sailor Pete and a black, shining ebony of hue and of enormous bulk, who suggested to him at once the idea of an ox in human shape. The three of them took in the crowd's respectful attitude at a glance. Then Jake led the way to the billiard table.

"Black Henry," said Jake, presenting the human ox to Weir, "this is Mr. Danforth—the stranger that Mother Juliet said already before he come yet that he will come by Twin Island. Shake, gentlemen."

Black Henry made no offer to shake hands with Weir—or Danforth, as the Settlement folk knew him; but the American felt that he was far from being uninterested.

The recent prisoner was clad only in an undershirt and blue jean trousers. Every so often he looked down at his bare feet and shook one after the other. He was still conscious of his chain.

"We got enough people in here for a party," Black Henry remarked, noting the men as if making a count. "How are we off for guards? You see, I know everything about guards now."

He laughed a cruel, low laugh in mockery of himself, glancing down at his ankles.

"Look round once," Jake said in a low voice.

For the first time Weir had leisure to take cognizance of the fact that while some of the invaders were standing about idle, there was a man on guard at each point in the hall from which interference or resistance might disclose itself.

"We got every spot watched and outside it's the same way yet," Jake went on. "So soon as me and Pete we found out already that the loony George was in the barn, and him gettin' away, too, I sent a couple of men after him. They looked and they looked all their eyes out, but they didn't find him yet.

"He'll sneak up to the big house, I told Pete; you remember? So we send a few fellers up here and gets the crowd from the Settlement."

"I see," Weir answered.

He spoke pleasantly, although he was sick enough of these ruffians to turn from them in disgust at whatever cost. And yet he feared them.

In his present plight his only backing were these cut-throats, whom he abhorred, and who would make an end of him, once they judged him to be dangerous, as lightly as they breathed.

"Where's Ransom?" asked Pete apprehensively.

"One of our boys juss told me he peeked in the winder a minute before we broke in and seen the captain on the floor in a heap," responded Jake in an offhand tone. "There was a lot of blood; I reckon Ransom kills the captain and keeps out of sight now a while."

"Where's the body, then?" Pete pursued.

"Ach! What a question feller you are," rejoined Jake with an impatient gesture. "They'd take it up-stairs with 'em, wouldn't they—Michael Sands and the rest?"

Thus was Pete satisfied.

At Black Henry's solicitation half a dozen of the men were added to the guard in and about the house.

Jake and Pete willingly agreed to the request, first to flatter the Ox, as Weir had come to call Black Henry to himself—and then because Black Henry was more familiar on this ground than they. He had grown almost from boyhood on this island and until now had been a favored employe of Captain Neville.

Weir grasped that neither Jake Haas nor Sailor Pete was greatly concerned at the nonappearance of Ransom. Of course the overseer would appear when he thought it safe to do so. In the meantime Jake and Pete with subtle flattery of attentions to Black Henry were riveting their command as masters of the expedition. Their game was as plain as their shining rifle-barrels when Weir looked back over the last few days.

Assured that everything was safely "bottled up" as Jake expressed it, Black Henry and three of the men made a raid on the larders and cellars of Half-moon House.

There was none to hinder them. Susan and her companion, Miss Addison; Rebecca, the colored cook; Rebecca's mother, Michael Sands, Captain Neville, Oscar Molle, the wireless operator; the two houseboys, known as the Brothers; the half-wit, Jolly George, and Scott the collie were all up-stairs behind locked doors and in darkness.

No one dared to make a light. As the night wore on one after the other of the terrified refugees fell asleep, all except Miss Addison.

When Black Henry and his assistants returned to the great hall they were carrying three large hampers packed with food and drink. Also Black Henry had foraged a khaki suit, the property of one of the Brothers.

Black Henry was voted master of the feast. His first instruction was that the broad reading-table should be cleared. This was done in three or four strokes of swift and willing arms. Papers, books and magazines were flung to every side of the room.

The men laughed like boys at play in obeying the order. It was the initial sign of animation among them.

Their eyes danced with joy at the sight of the huge cuts of cold beef and mutton and pork Black Henry produced from the hampers and placed in tempting array on the table. He had brought a plenty of

bread and butter also; two carving-knives only, because every man carried his own knife; no forks because every man had fingers; and no glasses because to every two men a bottle of wine was allowed and as Black Henry explained in concluding his statement.

"Every man has a mouth big enough without a glass."

For himself, Jake, Sailor Pete and the Stranger, as he persisted in calling Weir, there was a bottle to each and chairs at one end of the table. Black Henry laid an additional bottle near Weir's place.

"Huh!" Jake guffawed. "Henry thinks you look like a thirst all right yet."

"That other bottle's for the Stranger," Black Henry corrected. "This one's for William Ransom. When he comes he'll sit by the Stranger, won't he?"

At first Weir had difficulty in pretending to drink from his bottle. As a prime witticism Jake admonished him often that in case Ransom did not appear before midnight the Stranger would have to empty Ransom's bottle as well.

But as the night wore along Jake, who was nearest Weir, devoted his feverish interest in the occasion wholly to his own numerous bottles. He was ably seconded by Sailor Pete, and apparently by Black Henry—but only apparently.

Before the waxing hilarity of Jake should become too boisterous or the growing stodginess of Sailor Pete could develop into mere torpor Black Henry decided within himself that they must form further plans now. It would be imprudent to wait longer for Ransom, who might not dare return to the big house, Black Henry argued, until the morrow. By that time, he told his companions at the table, they should have begun to drive the people up-stairs into submission.

Jake was for shooting them up at once, but Black Henry had a method easier for themselves and surer of effect on the besieged. All the provisions for the household, he set forth, were in the larders on the first floor of the south wing.

"Keep them away from them there larders," Black Henry proposed, "and in a few days they'll be glad to eat out of our hand."

"Well, the guard's over there already, ain't it?" Jake asked.

Black Henry nodded.

" 'S all right, then," Jake returned. "I'm going to sing once."

"I'm juss ready for bed," Pete observed, casting his eyes about the room for a desirable spot.

There were too many, he thought, for a man to choose hastily. Heavy-footed, he ambled here and there in the room, trying an armchair or a corner of the wall-bench, like nothing so much as a lumbering mastiff in a strange house. Several of the blacks who were to take up the watch later in the night were already snoring or breathing like overfed cattle in chairs and on the floor.

At length Sailor Pete picked out his spot on the wall-bench between windows and opposite the billiard-table. Here he piled three leather pillows for himself and was preparing to stretch, when his foot struck hard against the leather flap of the cushion which hung down to the floor in front of the bench.

A queer sensation went up his leg at the stroke. The flap was not merely a flap as he had supposed, concealing emptiness. Nor was it solid, but seemed to have swung loose and bumped against something softish.

The sailor was too tired and sleepy to give any further notice to the novelties of furnishing in the big house, especially because at this moment Jake Haas began to sing in a maudlin cracked voice as he beat time with two bottles on the tables.

"Wait a minute, Jake," the sailor pleaded with his grunting laugh, "till I get started sleepin' or you been keep me awake all night."

"Shut up!" Jake retorted. "You Swede, what do you know about good music?"

"Good night, you Dutch hiker!" Sailor Pete returned with an oath that sickened Weir.

He thought their interchange of sallies might lead to a fight between the two ship's carpenters. Such a possible turn of events Weir envisaged with a welcoming eye. A mêlée among the men in the hall would serve the purpose of the besieged people in the big house and would afford him an opportunity to escape from the place.

Escape? His second thought forced him to realize anew how hopelessly marooned he was on the island. Miss Neville and her household held him in deadly enmity; and he was sure that while Jake and Pete extended grudging consideration it was only because of Ransom's dominance over them. This authority had dwindled fast in the happenings of the day.

As for Black Henry, without understanding why, Weir felt that the Ox distrusted him. He was soon to have proof of this intuition.

CHAPTER XXI.

WEIR VS. BLACK HENRY.

BLACK HENRY, who had been passing about the room observingly and who went from it to the entrance-hall, returned and spoke to Weir. He had been looking over things in the hall for the safety of the night, he said, and would now make inspection of the guard on the outside of the house. From the clearness of his eye and the workaday earnestness of his manner Weir could see that Black Henry had toyed with the bottle as innocuously as he himself had.

When the Ox was gone Weir got up from his chair—an ordinary proceeding that Jake had bibulously estopped a dozen times before he fell asleep—and walked away to the door. He wished to breathe in some of the air of the open and free his lungs if he could from the miasma of liquor, smoke, sweat, and villainous, bloody thoughts that fouled the atmosphere of the lofty, luxurious hall.

Then it was that he had proof of Black Henry's mistrust of him. He was within three steps of the door when a voice hailed him. Weir looked round. The black on duty at the door to the entrance-hall called across the room:

"You're not to go out, sir. Black Henry's orders. Nobody goes out."

"That's right," Weir returned with what composure he could muster.

The thought of being under the orders of Black Henry rasped his soul, yet he added to the guard:

"I'm only walking about a little to straighten out my legs."

The guard's face resumed its expression of carved ebony.

As he walked down the hall along the east wall, noting for distraction odds and ends of furniture peculiar to the room, Weir came opposite the bulletin-board. A few cards with orders or information for the household about matters of the island were tacked at the top. Underneath them were two yellow sheets of legal-cap size, side by side. On each sheet was a great deal of writing in purple ink.

The words *Cacique—Stephen Weir—New York—embezzlement* flared upon his sight as if inscribed in letters of fire.

REWARD OF $10,000

was the last phrase he read.

He dared not pause to go through the long statement lest one of the guards should remark his action, so he continued his stroll till he arrived at the foot of the curved staircase. One man was on duty at the bottom step and one midway of the stairs. Turning, Weir retraced his steps, his brain reeling in his mad anxiety to ascertain the full content of the wireless message on the bulletin-board.

For the first time in that night of shame and terror the heart of Stephen Weir quailed. From this description of the wireless Ransom had recognized him as the banker wanted in New York for embezzlement. He might wager with himself that none of the blacks could read. But that Jake Haas and Sailor Pete could he was almost certain.

He recalled his first impression of the two—that Jake would commit murder for a dollar and a half unless Pete should underbid him.

Nothing had happened to change this impression. What would they not do for an opportunity to secure ten thousand dollars!

Weir sat down again at the table, having removed his chair a comfortable distance from the moist, vaporous presence of Jake Haas, who was snoring loudly, the upper part of his body sprawled amid capsized bottles and discarded shreds of food.

The rifle which Weir had picked up from the billiard-table he kept with him. No one could make objection, for every man was similarly armed. The leaders carried a brace of pistols as well.

Weir had not forgotten, however, that he had no ammunition more than the loading in the rifle. He would get some somewhere, he resolved. Whatever the fight between the big house and the Settlement, he realized that he had a fight of his own to make.

It might be against either one or the other; it might be against both parties—and he determined as he shut his teeth together gently and let his eyelids droop as if he were dozing that he would make of it the fight of his life.

Black Henry appeared, disturbed and heated, running into the hall from the garden. He stopped by Weir for a moment and—it was almost as if he had read the American's thoughts—threw a belt of cartridges and a rifle on the table.

"Better you have this gun with the belt, Mr. Stranger," said Black Henry, " 'cos they fit."

Weir took the rifle and prepared to buckle on the belt.

"Thank you," he said, rising.

"The man that owned them there don't need 'em any more," Black Henry added.

He left Weir in order to awaken two men sleeping on the floor by hammering the soles of their feet with the barrel of his weapon. The men started up, grabbing for their guns. Black Henry gave them instructions in a low, rapid voice.

The men went forth from the hall immediately, nodding their heads to Black Henry amid muttered words such as:

"Yes, sir. We know. We will."

It took Black Henry all of five minutes to rouse Jake Haas into consciousness. The black tugged viciously at the little hair that was left on Jake's flat head, and jerked either end of his enormous mustache until it seemed to Weir that the bristles must come out in handfuls.

Jake's first observation as he lifted his head and looked round with bloodshot eyes was addressed to Sailor Pete.

"You dumbhead, didn't I tol' you once that means 'swallows flyin'?"

Black Henry slammed the palm of his hand with terrific force between Jake's shoulder-blades.

"Here! That ain't foolin'," Jake protested angrily and turned in his chair.

" 'Course it ain't no foolin'," Black Henry rejoined sharply. "You said you had guards everywhere, didn't you?"

"Oh, it's you, Henry," Jake noted in mollified tone. "Sure we have guards everywhere."

"How about that there point where the wireless is?"

"Ach! I have forgot that yet," Jake cried, slapping his hands against his bald crown.

"Where's Pete? Call Pete—he should know. Hay, Pete?" Jake added in a louder voice. "What about that there—?"

"Shut your face," Black Henry muttered wrathfully in Jake's ear.

Haas glanced at Henry. Ransom might say certain things; but the line was drawn at Black Henry.

The Ox contemplated the bloodshot glare with serenity, and continued quickly:

"You don't want to have the men know, do you, jess 'cos we forgot about the point one of their friends has been shot dead at the end of the north wing, where he was on duty?"

" 'S it you mean that already?" Jake queried in astonishment.

"Mr. Stranger here," Black Henry replied, and pointed to Weir, "is wearing his belt and has his rifle. I found the man myself. He was shot from the window above his head, I think, 'cos he has a bullet-hole right in the top of his skull."

"What we got to do yet?" Jake asked, flustered and barren of ideas away from his short-spoken monitor, Sailor Pete.

"It's done. They's a man at the point and another in the dead man's place."

"Everything's all right, then, till morning," observed Jake patronizingly, prone to drop forward on the table to sleep again.

"Mebbe yes; mebbe no," Black Henry said sarcastically. "If we lose one man a day as easy as that, we ain't got to go long to lose ourselves."

" 'S all right now," Jake returned, drowsing. "You did fine already, Henry."

"And if Michael managed to send a wireless before I picked up that feller dead," Black Henry added hotly, "and a steamer slips down on us before—"

Jake Haas was sprawling on the table again and snoring. Close to Weir came Black Henry and faced him as he sat with one leg on the edge of the table.

He addressed the American respectfully, in confidence and with blunt scrutiny in his big, bovine eyes.

"Mr. Stranger, I didn't see no cause for you a-bein' in at this here party where you didn't belong. But Overseer Ransom brung you, and what he does is good enough for me.

"I 'most got to like you when we was eatin' here to see the way you handled them bottles. You couldn't have come away drier if we didn't have no bottles.

"Jake and Pete they's foolish that way, and they makes a mess of things. You seen yourself they does.

"Another thing. They've got it in their heads to boss this job. Not with a-huggin' o' them bottles they won't. That's why they doesn't care when Ransom comes back

—if he does come. Now I want him right here quick's he can come. That's clear, ain't it?"

Weir nodded.

"He's the only boss, an' he's goin' to be the boss as long as he lives and I'm round, or Black Henry's black hide will turn dirty white with being a hound and a coward."

The man's big eyes and thick lips were pointed at the sprawling trunk and arms of Jake Haas with an expression of nauseating contempt. He switched round suddenly on Weir, asking:

"What do you say, Mr. Stranger?"

"I suppose you are right, sir."

"Of course. Now tell me—where's Ransom?"

"I don't know," Weir answered thoughtfully and slowly.

"You seen Michael Sands carry the captain up-stairs, didn't you? You was talkin' with Miss Susan here, wasn't you? Tell me where Ransom is—you better, Mr. Stranger."

"I don't know," Weir answered in the same tone as before.

"They makes believe they's tryin' to ketch you in here so's to trick us—"

"What's that?" Weir interrupted, springing to his feet and holding his rifle across his waist. "You mean to say that was all put up? That I—"

"Gentle-like! Gentle! Sit down calm," Black Henry interrupted soothingly and waved his hand in a patting gesture. "I can see I'm wrong in that there and that you're a speakin' true. I can tell, you bet."

"And you don't need to be a fortune-teller, either," Weir retorted, still standing, "to know that I tell the truth or I tell nothing."

"Of course," jeered the Ox.

They had been conversing in subdued voices. The men scattered about them on the floor or in chairs were deep in slumber. The guards at either end of the long hall were far removed and drowsed on their feet as the night dwindled away, and there was nothing for them to do but stand and await their relief.

Black Henry leaned heavily over the table. He had not taken his eyes from Weir's for a second during the past several moments. His lips parted in a jeering grin and two rows of enormous, fang-like teeth glistened against the sooty blackness of his skin.

Weir's eyes were as steadfast as Black Henry's. There was a deadly gleam in them that feezed the Ox. Black Henry looked down on the table and beheld another gleam, but different.

He stood smiling, staring; he seemed like a man turned into stone.

No faintest flicker showed in Weir's eyes, which still were fixed only on Black Henry's face. One hand grasped a long, razor-edged carving-knife. Black Henry could feel the scratchy, needle-point of the blade caught in the goods of his shirt, half an inch above his belt.

"You have twenty and more men to set upon me like wolves," Weir murmured in an even, conversational fashion. "But before they can act—I act. I'll take my medicine standing—but you get yours first. That's plain, isn't it?"

His hand gripped the knife tighter.

"What must I do? I'll do it. For this knife and because Ransom's your friend," Black Henry muttered.

He was abjectly cowed—afraid of the immediate peril of the knife, but more afraid, perhaps, of Ransom. He could not believe that any man would dare what the Stranger dared without the backing of the overseer.

"Believe me when I tell you the truth," Weir enjoined upon him. "Don't badger me! I'll obey orders and mind my own business."

"Right-o!" Black Henry gasped faintly. "You're Ransom's man, and so'm I."

There was a hurried rapping of knuckles on the door leading to the garden. Black Henry drew away as Weir put down the carving-knife and hastened to answer the summons. Weir sat down, laying the rifle across his knees. In a few moments Black Henry returned from the outside."

"We've got Oscar Molle, the wireless man," he said. "He was sending a message."

CHAPTER XXII.

OSCAR'S MESSAGE.

OSCAR MOLLE was captive, and he knew in his heart that it was largely if not entirely his own fault.

"I'm askin' you to do no more than your duty, young man," Michael Sands had said before sending him to the point. "But it's a ticklish job at that, and I would be far from askin' you if I could do it meself.

Faith, I'm as much use at the wireless as a baby is handy with a flying machine."

Partly to stimulate Oscar's courage and partly to make him realize the desperate situation he himself was in, Michael was at great pains to prove that no other course was open. He told Oscar that Miss Susan was suddenly and alarmingly ill. He hoped with care and a happy turn in events that she would recover from the shock almost as promptly as she had succumbed to it.

Sands had stealthily made up a sleeping-potion in the medicine-closet, pretending that he was preparing something for Susan's father.

He put it at the spot on the table by her father's bedside where she had a glass of water which she sipped frequently.

"Since then, Oscar," Michael related, "she's been sleeping like a child on the long sofie at the foot of the captain's bed. The captain will be back to himself by mornin', I'm thinkin'. He has no bruise on his head annywhere.

"Them marks on his neck will be actin' sore, yet if I hadn't nicked Ransom just when I did he might have done for the captin, bad 'cess to him! I enjoyed the shot, too. It went where I sent it and no delay.

"Do you the same, Oscar, and we'll bag these rascals before they have time to do more than soil the hall with their dirty carcasses. Any ship will answer, any station will forward the message I'll give ye, because the urgency of it would be impressive even to a mule. You see what I mean, don't you, that the meanin' of it can't be mistaken?"

Oscar pleaded for one of the Brothers as escort.

"Had I one more man on my roster you should have your pick, Oscar. So heart of oak within ye and legs with wings to them. You have your two revolvers—have ye?"

Oscar answered that he had them and touched one in either side pocket of his coat.

"Good so, lad. Here's the message."

Oscar accepted the scrap of letter paper on which Michael had written:

> Big Twin Island, mutiny. Many in danger. Assist at once. NEVILLE.

Michael uncoiled the fire rope that lay in a basket under the window, while Oscar stole a glance timidly to see how far he would have to drop. He jerked back into the hall instantly.

"Say it," Michael encouraged him, because in the dim light of the hall he could see that Oscar's face was pale with fear.

"A guard's walkin' down there with a gun, just like those fellows I met at the doors."

"Which way's the wind, Oscar?" Michael asked.

"It's carrying straight out over the bay," Oscar replied.

"That was my notion also. It's a bit of a traveler, too, I've noticed all evenin', because it worried Miss Susan. Poor girl, I'm sorry for her—but we must look out for ourselves first; eh, lad?"

Before Oscar thoroughly made out what Michael was up to he had whipped his revolver from his pocket, leaned far down over the window-sill and hung there. The wind swelled, rattling loose shutters of Half-moon House and whistling in the wind-break of trees standing off to the north. Even Oscar hardly heard the noise of the shot.

Michael sprang back into the hall like the blade of a good knife.

"Quick, lad!" Michael urged, slipping the rope under the young man's armpits. "They never heard that shot. I'll give ye ten minutes to get to the point, send the message and return. That's runnin' time, ye know."

"You're sure there's no one out at the point?" Oscar asked finally.

"Sure; I've had one of the Brothers at this window ever since they broke into the house. The wireless is the first thing we think of, but the last with them, for they never see the use of it. I'm sure there's no one beyant as yet."

Michael had helped Oscar out of the window and was letting him down.

"However, in case you do meet anybody —what are your guns for?"

With this he dropped Oscar swiftly within half a foot of the ground. Pulling the rope up over his head, Oscar flung it away from him, and darted for the point. Michael was winding up the rope as he said to himself:

"He's as brave as a rabbit; he ought to be able to run like one. If he'll only get the message through, I'll not worry about him. No one would hurt him, and it's small use he is hereabouts, what with the captain dislikin' him and Miss Susan sick because of his slanderin' lies."

Nevertheless, Michael waited not ten but twenty minutes for the return of Oscar

Molle. Then he set one of the Brothers to watch at the window. Caleb it was. He reported shortly that the body of the dead guard had been taken away by two men, who dragged it around the corner of the north wing.

Michael's persuasion in sending Oscar to the point was adroit and subtle, but he did not know that Oscar possessed a most compelling motive of his own for proximity to the wireless cabin—the knowledge he had picked up as to who the castaway was. Setting to work in frantic haste as soon as reached the station, he sent a message to Jarvis, Secretary of the Fruit Company, to the Palladium Trust Company and to the Acme Detective Agency, the same communication to all three. It read as follows:

> From Big Twin Island, Captain Neville, owner and resident. Oscar Molle, my confidential clerk, has found Stephen Weir, absconder, washed up on beach here from open boat of Ss. Cacique. Please claim promptly, as owing to conditions here he cannot be kept long. Answer.

Oscar, who was not in the habit of inditing compositions of his own, toiled and sweated over many discarded drafts before he satisfied himself that this version was the best for his purpose. This decided, he sent the message, and then proceeded to think about crackling off the appeal that Michael Sands had described as having sufficient urgency to impress a mule.

In his exaltation at the thought of gaining the ten thousand dollars reward he had lost count of the fleeting moments. He fancied he had spent not more than five minutes on his own business.

He was feeling in his pocket for the slip of paper Michael had given him when something cold and round and hard was pressed against the back of his neck.

"Keep your hands in your coat—don't move them an inch—and stand up!" a low, gruff voice commanded from behind.

Oscar kept his hands in his pockets, uselessly clutching his revolvers. He stood up.

The chair was kicked to one side for him —and Oscar Molle dropped to the floor of the cabin in a dead faint.

The man whom Black Henry had roused from sleep in the hall a little while before planted one foot lightly on Oscar's stomach. Then he became greatly interested in picking the wireless instrument to pieces where he could and battering it with the barrel of his rifle in such parts as offered resistance.

This work was completed early the next morning by Black Henry and two of his men, when they placed a mine under the wireless masts and blew them and the larger part of the cabin off the point into the dancing waves of Half-moon Bay.

Dawn was peering from the hazy East as they returned with Oscar and Oscar's guard in the steam launch Susan. They had taken the launch from the boat-house at the foot of the plaza under cover of darkness, and had kept it outside the cove, near the shore, to avoid any notice from the big house.

Following the line of the island as closely as was prudent, they steamed swiftly along until they arrived at the warehouse wharf of the Settlement. Black Henry concluded that it would be more convenient to tie the Susan here, where she would always be easily accessible.

Oscar was marched up to the Settlement in a triangle formed by the three men, while Black Henry sought out Mother Juliet. His account of the state of things coincided marvelously in the view of the blacks with the prediction of the seeress. This in itself was a supreme satisfaction, even though their husbands had not actually acquired the riches and the power of which they had beheld visions for so long.

The man who had been shot dead on guard duty happened to be a bachelor, as Black Henry knew, and so his demise was not mentioned.

Away from the Settlement in the great hall of the big house some of the women's husbands were now having breakfast. The men who had kept the late night-watches were sleeping and those who had slept were now fresh and alert at six in the morning.

Stephen Weir sat apart in an armchair by the fire, dozing fretfully. His rifle lay across his knees.

None of the Settlement people sought him, nor did he seek them. To them he was an alien—the Stranger. Also, to the more suspicious he was the last man seen with Overseer Ransom—and there was yet no word or sign from Ransom.

They might not have thought so particularly of the overseer if Black Henry had not whispered to one and all of them in turn:

"Look sharp for Mr. Ransom. It's not like him to act this here way."

When Weir saw the pig-like rush the men made for the coffee-urns was over he

got up and filled and drank three cupfuls and ate a few slices of bread. Then he went back unnoticed to his seat by the fire.

Sailor Pete did not rest so comfortably on the floor as on the cushion bench. In his sleep he kept trying to roll toward the wall to find a softer spot.

Each time he rolled over on his right side he struck his face against the leather flap pendant from the bench. Finally he tossed it up and rolled, half asleep, half awake, completely under the bench.

By this time his struggles had become an object of amusement to a few of the men who stood near. They burst into laughter when he partly disappeared under the bench, and laughed still more heartily when they heard him bawl in there:

"You yuss get right off o' my bed or I'll knock you off!"

The man he addressed showed not the least inclination to comply with the request. Thereupon Sailor Pete became suddenly wide awake and furiously angry. He backed out from under the bench, clutching the man by his shirt and belt, and dragged him into the broad daylight.

His hands flew up in horror as he recognized Overseer Ransom's face and the fixity of death in the staring eyes and pinched features. The mulatto's skin had a blue tinge. Ransom's khaki jacket was stained a darker brown over his heart.

"Killed! Ransom's killed! killed!" Sailor Pete shrieked out. Covering his face with his hands, he got up on his feet, uttering blood-curdling groans.

At the piano Jake Haas was pumping out "Nearer, My God, to Thee" at his loudest and fastest. Stumbling across the floor to the far corner where the piano stood, Pete brought both his fists like hammers down on Jake's shoulders and cursed him for a fool.

"I hear you! I hear you!" Jake cried, jumping from his seat. "What's the use hittin' me yet? Can't you tell me without hittin'?"

"Shut up! Look!" Pete cut in and pointed to Ransom's body on the rug.

"It's Ransom, Pete," said Jake Haas, half stupid with bewilderment.

"Shot! Here!" Pete rejoined and placed his hands, shaking as with palsy, against his heart.

Jake read the tidings also in the groans and affrighted whisperings of the blacks, who started all their sleeping fellows up in alarm. They all shrank away from the spot, superstitious in dread of death.

"*Ach! Ach!*" Jake Haas whined, swabbing his eyes with a dirty blue handkerchief. "What for a luck is that when it's all goin' so nice and we have such a fine time last night already! *Ach,* Pete! It's rotten!"

He advanced nearer the body, gazing down on it. Pete followed him, saying:

"It turns my stomach, Jake. He was yuss there all last night while we was so jolly and him looking at us with them eyes. Why don't somebody close his eyes?"

Pete turned his head away, writhing in every fiber.

"Who done it, I wonder?" Jake asked, pawing his mustache apart with his black, stumpy fingers.

"Who's dead—Ransom?" asked Stephen Weir, running out into the middle of the room.

In answer to his question every man in the hall told him with their gaze as plainly as if they spoke the words:

"You knew he was there! You know who killed him!"

But the only utterance came from Sailor Pete and solemnly:

"We yuss got to wait for Black Henry."

CHAPTER XXIII.

BLOOD-MONEY AND CHAINS.

FOR some time that morning Black Henry kept Oscar Molle at the Settlement in his own cottage. He confided Molle to his three assistants, who took the Belgian into the darkened cellar where Mother Juliet did her divination stunts.

The air of the cellar was fetid and nauseating. The psychological atmosphere was choking to Molle, yet he could not but be impressed by the sagacity of the seeress in her statements about him. Nevertheless he was too shrewd to answer questions that might inculpate him with Black Henry.

She asked several times in several different degrees of vagueness the one question to which Black Henry desired an answer:

Had Oscar sent out an alarm by wireless summoning some ship or any ship to Big Twin Island?

To Mother Juliet he would make no answer on this point. To Black Henry he had said repeatedly, even when threatened

with torture, that if they would take him to the hall of Half-moon House he would give and prove to them his answer.

On whether a steamer had been hailed by wireless hung the whole success or failure of the siege at the big house. No plan was more perilous than that of starving out the besieged if a steamer were liable to drop anchor any day off Half-moon Bay.

Ransom and all the leaders knew that none of the vessels which made regular calls at the island was due about this time. This was one reason why Jake Haas and Sailor Pete had been so impatient to free Black Henry.

The guard, therefore, led Oscar to the big house, and Black Henry bade the men keep him in the entrance while he first looked over the hall.

"Ransom's dead!" groaned the man at the outside door.

Oscar showed as utter an astonishment at the news as any of the blacks. Inwardly he was wondering where they had found the body and how, for Michael Sands had given Molle no intimation of what had become of it after he left the room.

"Ransom's dead!" the men on duty in the entrance-hall murmured to Black Henry as he passed.

"Ransom's dead!"

The words rose in wails and moans and in unexpected high voices that broke in terror and in sorrow. They dinned in Black Henry's ears so that his brain whirled.

Yet he walked stiffly to the billiard-table, where Jake and Pete had laid out the stark body of the giant overseer and closed his eyes. They had placed two long bench-cushions of red leather end to end down the middle of the table against the vivid green baize. On these reposed all that was mortal of Overseer William Ransom.

During the short stay in his own cottage Black Henry had dressed himself in his best suit of khaki. He was a much more presentable and imposing figure to his men than he had been the past night, when he came freed from the irons and wearing only jean trousers and an undershirt.

He drew a large white handkerchief from his pocket as he stood gazing down at Ransom's stone-like visage.

On the other side of the billiard-table stood Sailor Pete, his pipe clenched between his teeth, although there was not a grain of tobacco in it. He stood as motionless as Overseer Ransom lay.

Black Henry studied Pete for a moment, then crossed to the other side of the table and sought the information he required from Jake.

The two men conferred in whispers. Jake, it was plain, was immediately alive to the fact that the chieftainship of the Settlement blacks lay in the hands of Black Henry from this morning forward.

Black Henry wandered about the hall aimlessly a few times. In no other way could he bring himself back to the actual business in hand.

He came to a halt in front of the fireplace. His back almost touched the armchair in which Stephen Weir sat listening and facing the flames thoughtfully.

"We all got to stop, men, jess right here now," Black Henry began in tones that gradually grew steadier. "We must not forget our job, you see. A little carelessness and we lose all we got so far. Guards must look sharper than ever, 'cos we got to ketch the man what killed William Ransom."

It rather astonished him that they all seemed to be staring beyond him. Black Henry turned and glanced down over the back of the armchair just as Stephen Weir stood up and confronted him.

"Good morning, Mr. Stranger," Black Henry said solemnly. "So Mr. Ransom was layin' dead under the bench there all night and none of us nor you knew nothin' about it, did we?"

"I told you the truth," said Weir, "and you said you believed me last night."

"That was when you was Ransom's man and I was his man too. Now I'm my own man."

For the purpose of turning their minds into the line of their work and because he did not intend to lose much more time in the matter, Black Henry gave orders to have Oscar Molle brought into the hall at once.

"Now, Mr. Molle," Black Henry began briskly, "you see Mr. Ransom lyin' dead there. He was found here. He was shot in the heart, and that knocks a man where he stands, don't it? So he was shot here last night when he came to see Captain Neville. What do you know about it?"

"I know nothing at all about it," Oscar replied, facing Black Henry without flinching.

"You don't know nothin' at all about it

—the shot, the gun, the man who fired, when it happened, when he was put there, or who put him there? You don't know none of them there things?"

"Nothing," Oscar answered.

Everybody seemed convinced of Oscar's complete ignorance of the circumstances of Ransom's death. Their minds had been made up before Black Henry interrogated him.

"Jess you keep your promise now, Mr. Molle," pursued Black Henry, "by tellin' us if you called a boat by wireless to help out Michael and the captain."

"I have not," Oscar stated firmly.

"But Jim here, who took you up, he says he seen you a wirelessin', and Jim ain't a fool and he ain't a liar."

Oscar admitted that he had sent one wireless message, but that it was on purely personal business.

"Right-o!" exclaimed Black Henry, and added bluntly: "Tell us what this personal business was."

Molle was not blind to the fact that Michael Sands would have but little use for him again. According to Michael's code he should have killed his man or died rather than be taken.

There was none of this fighting spirit in Molle, however. His gifts were of a different order.

He was aware also that his days on the island were numbered, because of the quarrel he had brought on between Susan and her father in revenge for her snubbing his advances. Both were ill; when they recovered there would be a grand reconciliation and each would tell the other just how the misunderstanding had arisen.

People in families always acted so, with the result that the outsider was shoved farther outside than before.

Finally, however, the shrewd suspicion had been developing in Molle's mind ever since the seizure of Half-moon House that Michael and the captain would eventually have to throw up their hands to the invaders. And the reward of ten thousand dollars sang in his ears a siren song, so that he had visions of heaping gold in whatever his eyes dwelt upon.

"I'll tell you, Black Henry, what the message was, but not the others," he said. "I only promised to tell you."

He beckoned to the Ox, who approached him slowly. Molle took Henry's arm and led him down the hall to the bulletin-board.

"First you read what's written on the yellow sheets on the board," he said. "You'll see I'm not lying. But you must not let on to Jake or Pete that you are reading. Pretend we're talking."

Black Henry grinned as he hardly looked at the yellow sheets.

"I don't need to pretend," he said. "Jake and Pete don't know, nor the men don't know. I'll tell you though, and you jess disremember: I can't neither read or write. Ransom could"—he cast a glance toward the dead man—"and he always said he'd learn me some day."

Rapidly then and almost in a whisper Molle told Black Henry the object, amount and conditions of the ten thousand dollars reward.

"And I'll give you half, Black Henry, if you help me deliver the man," he promised finally.

Black Henry calculated before he spoke again.

"You jess mean if that there feller is ketched alive I get five thousand dollars and if we ketch him dead I get two thousand five hundred. That what you mean?"

"No, Henry. I mean on the flat; you get five thousand if you help me deliver the man, because I found him alive."

"You have found him alive?" Black Henry echoed, a light coming into his big bovine eyes. "And who'd you tell about it beyond me here?"

"The Fruit Company at New Orleans."

Oscar judged it wiser to confess to only one message.

"You mean that there Fruit Company of ours?" Black Henry asked.

He smacked his thick lips nervously. His whole expression and pose disclosed alarm and perturbation.

"Naturally. They are the people who will send for the bank-thief and pay us the money," Oscar explained.

"And jess like as not, I expeck," Black Henry remarked meditatively, "they'll send for him mighty quick."

"Of course," Oscar assented promptly, wholly ignorant of Black Henry's plan to bring the captain's household to capitulation by the slow, sure process of starving it.

"Where you been a hidin' this here ten-thousand-dollar man?" Black Henry inquired abruptly.

"Why, he's the man the Brothers and myself were trying to grab in here last night when your men rushed in."

Black Henry's eyes bulged.

"The Stranger?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"That may be what you call him, but his name is Stephen Weir."

"Did Ransom know about this here reward?" asked Black Henry.

"Of course. He was supposed to tell you people at the Settlement to keep an eye on the shore. By the captain's orders I gave him a complete copy of the message just as it's there on the board."

"Then Ransom brung him up here last night just to get that money, I bet. Instead he gets shot in the heart. And you come round tellin' me you'll give me half the reward what ain't yours noways. You're robbin' a dead man what can't help himself, that's what you're a tryin' to do."

Oscar's blood froze before the wicked glare in Black Henry's eyes. He looked about him as if to flee.

Black Henry's huge hand gripped Molle by the shoulder and his thumb stretched lightly but surely against the wireless man's windpipe.

"Know what you jess done, you mis'ble idiot?" he cried. "You'll jess bring a ship down on our necks from that there Fruit Company which like as not puts us all in quod—curse your puppy-dog face!

"Here, two of you big fellers down there!" he yelled. "You, Ned Wilson! And you, Jim Hall! Come along quick!"

Immediately two big, brutish fellows picked themselves out of the group of blacks, who for some time had been conferring among themselves in whisperings and mutterings.

They had moved away from the fireplace, but frequently their eyes returned to it, sullen and determined, and to the figure of Stephen Weir seated there with his rifle across his knees in the high-back armchair.

"Men, you jess take Mr. Molle," Black Henry ordered casually, as if he were requesting a cup of coffee, "and put him in the cottage with those fellers what work around this here house. There's two guards down there.

"But first you pick up some of them there irons what's left of my jewelry at the barn. They's enough for a little puppy-dog like him. And I want you to dress him neat and tight—don't forget!

"When we have the captain and Sands prime, why, we'll find some more chains. I know jess how irons feel, and rot me if I ain't a goin' to make other folks know, too."

Oscar Molle had stood as one bereft of all sense and power of motion. But when the two blacks, one at either side, caught him up by wrist and ankle and held him drawn taut, face down as if he were already in irons, he began to moan.

His moan broke into a cry, his cry into horrible maniacal shrieks as the men marched away with him, throwing back a knowing grin at their fellows. It was as much as to say: "Never you fear. We'll be right back—for that other business."

The screams of Oscar Molle rang gruesomely all through the house and rode back to it on the breeze long after the men had taken him off.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PASSING OF A LEADER.

WHATEVER "that other business" might be, it left small room in the attention of the Settlement for Oscar Molle or even for Jake Haas or Sailor Pete.

The latter pair, some of them did notice carelessly, were summoned by a wave of Black Henry's hand to come to him where he stood in front of the bulletin-board. But their increasingly feverish interest was centered in the Stranger, seated before the crackling logs in the fireplace.

Weir knew well enough why Oscar Molle had been carried out to be put in irons. Black Henry's bawling charge that the wireless operator had brought a Fruit Company's ship down on their necks informed him partly. Then as Molle was being taken off he pleaded pitiably amid his shrieks:

"Don't! Don't do this! You can have all the ten thousand dollars! All of it!"

"What's he squawkin' about ten thousand dollars yet?" Jake Haas asked when he and Pete had joined Black Henry.

The latter pointed to the yellow messages on the bulletin-board and inquired what the ship's carpenters thought of them. Jake and Pete read both messages.

"How do you mean already, what we think?" Jake queried.

"You kin read, can't you?" Black Henry said gruffly.

"Sure we kin. But this here says—" and Jake rendered the contents of the message in brief form.

Black Henry breathed more easily. Jake's reading of the yellow sheets tallied in all particulars with that of Oscar Molle.

"'S all right," Jake concluded. "But we ain'd nothings with that to do, is we?"

"We jess have everything to do with it," Black Henry muttered and drew them closer to explain.

Both Jake and Pete stepped back, astounded at the revelation.

"*Ach!* So!" Jake ejaculated softly.

Sailor Pete merely shifted his pipe to the other side of his mouth so that he might glance furtively toward the fireplace.

"Split the money in three," the sailor suggested in practical mood. "It will yuss give us enough for some fun and not to go foolish."

"Yes, cut it in three, Black Henry," Jake added.

Deliberately Black Henry turned his head and gazed upon Overseer Ransom from a distance, at his stony yellow face, at the red-leather cushions glowing dull against the green baize, over which he had lately sobbed convulsively.

"William was a goin' to do it," he decided as he faced the others again, "and I jess think we better do it for him. We'll do it for revenge on the feller what killed him."

"Sure," Jake affirmed. "We'll cut it in three."

"In four. The money splits in four," Black Henry corrected quietly.

"Four?" Sailor Pete echoed. "Yuss why you make that four?"

Black Henry's ox-like head swung from side to side as he apportioned the shares.

"The first four you get, Pete," he said. "The second four Jake gets—and I'll jess take what's left."

"So?" Jake's voice scaled half an octave on the word.

"You dirty loafer, what the—"

Black Henry's neck-muscles stiffened as he threw up his head.

"Sh! Yuss easy, Jake," Sailor Pete admonished as he clapped his hand over his pal's moist, straggling mustache. "It's only a little countin'-mistake Black Henry's been makin'."

"Mistake?" Black Henry snapped. "I jess can count six times faster on my fingers than you kin on paper."

In the dispute none of the three men had taken notice of the shuffling feet and raised voices at the other end of the hall.

At this moment, with the suddenness of a stroke of lightning, a hideous uproar of yelling and jeering fell into the midst of their conference.

"Rot them! What are they a doin'?" cried Black Henry, jerking his pistols from his belt and setting out on a waddling run for the frenzied group of Settlement men about the fireplace.

They were chattering, yelling, gibing at Stephen Weir, who stood close to the hearth, surrounded by their wild, gibbering faces and outreaching arms. He kept them off from him only by wielding the barrel of his gun, constant and swift as a flail, on their bruised and bloody heads.

Head erect, his face as white as chalk, towering and fixed as a rock he stood, plunged at from every point except from the rear where the blazing logs formed his guard.

The fight had been on for not more than a minute. Yet somehow Weir had contrived to effect a good record for swinging his gun as a club. His arms moved from the sides of his motionless body with the rapidity and unerring aim of a perfect mechanism.

But his foes were far too many for him and the sight of blood on one another's faces only enraged them to greater ferocity. Besides, their concerted attack had been sprung on him so suddenly that Weir had fought with every ounce of nerve and energy from the start, with the result that now he began to find his wind failing him. His assailants labored madly but wildly to land a gun-barrel on his head, yet thus far without success.

Nor was it their purpose to strike him down. They wanted merely to get hold of the Stranger's arms.

One of them did not fight at all, but waited on the outer edge of the circle. Over his right arm he bore poised a coil of hemp rope. The slip-noose was balanced in his left hand ready to be slung at the barest possible chance to ring it on Weir's head.

"You jess dirty cowards!" roared Black Henry, adopting a sentimental pose for reasons of his own. "Why don't you fight fair? Give the man a chance for his life!"

"Give the man a chance for his life! A chance!" echoed Jake and Pete at the top of their voices.

A few of the men broke away from the circle and charged Black Henry and his two associates with rifle-butts. They beat

their leaders back furiously, yelling as they did so:

"He killed Ransom! And he's got to swing for it! The rope! The rope!"

"The rope! The rope!" they all yelled simultaneously.

Black Henry, Jake and Pete, at a signal from the first, pulled out their knives and began to slash right and left.

"Not deep!" Black Henry warned the others. "Jess flick it—they hate knives."

Yet though their shirts were cut into ribbons and their black backs streamed with blood the men still fought to throw the noose about Weir's neck.

Suddenly they stood still, bending forward, one leaning above the other.

"He's down! He's down!"

The shouting rose in glorious triumph. Some one said:

"Make room! Let him in with the rope!"

Then all the uproar of voices diminished into groans, mutterings, whispers even, as they made way for the man with the rope to reach his quarry.

In the primitive mind of the Settlement blacks the avenging of the murder of Overseer Ransom transcended every other thought in importance. He was the genius who had planned and carried out the great enterprise that had put them here in possession of the big house.

When the long awaited hour that marked the beginning of their triumph had struck he was foully cheated of his share—the lion's share they would willingly have made it.

The presence of his body, lying here in the hall among them, as he had always been in life, was like sacred fuel to the fire of their blood-fever. It would be appeased only with the blood of the Stranger, whose doom had been sealed automatically and almost without a word among them, not more than five minutes after Sailor Pete had dragged Ransom's body from concealment under the bench.

As for motive impelling the Stranger to the murder of Ransom, their simple, suspicious brains required no motive. It was enough that the Stranger had killed Ransom.

But Black Henry, Jake and Sailor Pete were cognizant of one motive that might have impelled the Stranger to such a deed—namely, the knowledge that Ransom had his secret. It occupied their attention. But their object was to prevent the Settlement men from hanging Stephen Weir, because that would mean to them a joint loss of five thousand dollars.

Not many minutes after the screams of Oscar Molle had died down, the guards outside were again startled, not by the shouting of one voice but of many voices in the great hall. One more excitable than the others raised the cry that Michael Sands was charging their fellows inside.

His name was the tocsin of terror. All the discipline through which Ransom had paced the Settlement men for months was forgotten in an instant. Every guard-post was deserted and every sentinel about the hall edged to the fireplace.

With the others they either struggled, furious as wild beasts, to put the noose on the neck of Stephen Weir, or fought off the interference of Black Henry and the ship's carpenters, cursing them for delay and cowardice in avenging Ransom.

The fight in the hall and the disappearance of the guard had not escaped the vigilant eye of Michael Sands and the Brothers, who acted for him with all the sagacity of trained hounds. On the very instant that the Settlement men raised the hysteric, joyous yell: "He's down! He's down!" a mighty explosion shook the walls of the great hall and roared again in echo all through the house.

The triumphing yells of the little mob huddled near the fireplace were suddenly transformed into cries and groans of fright and pain. One and all they were flung down upon the man they sought to hang, as if they were so many chess-pieces swept from the board with a stroke of the hand.

At the bottom of the heap lay Stephen Weir on his back. The noose of the rope was round his neck. His face was a mere blot of blood and the front of his khaki jacket sodden with it.

Out straight his arms were stretched, inert, although his left hand still clutched the barrel of his rifle.

Promptly the Settlement men picked themselves up. All turned with the same motion to ascertain the cause of the explosion. Wads of paper and cotton waste strewed the floor and were imbedded in their clothes.

As they looked a second report, louder than the first, crashed deafeningly.

Half-blinded and choking with smoke, they gazed awe-stricken for a second or

more at two small brass cannon on wooden carriages which were planted beside the billiard-table.

Caleb of the Brothers was swiftly reloading one. Joshua had just fired the other.

Behind them, bristling, erect, was the short, enormously broad frame of Michael Sands, his smiling, savage face at aim on his rifle.

"Out! Out! Every dirty mother's son of ye!" he roared in thunderous voice. "The first man that stands tastes the pepper of my bar'l. Ask Ransom here beside me how it tastes. He'd tell ye if he could.

" 'Twill be shot in the cannon this time if ye dare to come back. I wouldn't soil the floor with ye in the house."

That the wily, perjured Ransom said one true thing in his day was proved now. He had told Mother Juliet that every man except himself in the Settlement was afraid of Michael Sands.

In panic and terror most of the blacks fled before Michael had finished his threat. They carried their loaded rifles with them as useless as if they were walking-sticks. Black Henry, Jake Haas and Sailor Pete ran ahead of all the others, leading the rout toward the barn.

The last fugitive to reach this building, which was a quarter of a mile from the big house, brought the startling information that Michael Sands was loading the cannon with shot.

Here assembled, they began to consider by what bad management they had come to lose so easily possession of the big house, a prize for which they had toiled and plotted and waited so long.

Charges and counter-charges grew violent and spleenful. The men were again at the point of fighting among themselves.

Black Henry turned toward Jake Haas and Sailor Pete for counsel. The sailor deliberately showed his back and gave his whole attention to filling his pipe. Jake Haas walked into the barn, spitting copiously and growling to himself.

CHAPTER XXV.

HUNGRY AS THEY WAIT.

FOR a moment Michael Sands surveyed the blacks as they leaped wildly through the garden and away toward the barn. Then with a grin he swung round quickly and cast an appraising glance over the hall.

"Here, Joshua!" he said, addressing the Brother, who stood between the cannon; "Pile every bit of food and drink on the table into the hampers and hoist them up the stairs—quick, d'ye mind? These blackguards will be back at us as soon as they pick the confetti out of their hair."

Joshua hastened to carry out the order, silent as if he had not the power of speech, and showing no emotion except when he moved from his post near the billiard-table.

Then it was that he gave his first and only glance at Ransom's body. He shuddered and put his hands to his eyes for an instant.

"Them fellers are what I call runnin' fighters," Michael continued as he went about the room, picking up a rifle or two that had been abandoned and laying them on the stairs. " Steer them this way as they were steered last night, and it would take twice as many men to stop them. Steer them as they're steered now and wild horses couldn't catch them.

"Mind you now, they'll steer this way next—and we'll have to get the brass work up before they do."

As he issued his orders Michael Sands walked up and down the hall like a frightened terrier, glancing through the windows at either side. This he kept up until the Brothers had carried up-stairs the three hampers containing the remnants of the invaders' feast, and had safely restored the cannon to the next floor.

Then Michael called them, almost angrily in his haste, to the fireplace.

"The lad!" he said, pointing down. "Gèntle but quick with ye!"

The Brothers lifted the bruised, unconscious form of Stephen Weir. The noose was round his neck; Michael coiled the length of it on his breast. With Weir's rifle under one arm and his own ready for action, Michael then followed the Brothers and their burden. He walked backward rapidly, judging his course by the thudding felt of their heels and keeping every possible point of access under his sharp, steady eyes.

"If the lad's dead he's worth five, Brothers," he murmured; "if he's alive, tin —and I'm thinkin' it's the captain himself should have all of whatever it is, with Ransom gone."

The Brothers could not understand his

allusions, even if they had not been too frightened and hurried to hear it.

Just as Sands was vanishing from sight and range on the landing there was the *crack!* of a rifle from the door of the entrance-hall. Stephen Weir's weapon, which Michael carried under his left arm, slipped its hold and tumbled, clattering, down the steps.

"Blast yer black sowl!" Michael growled under his breath. "But it's only me finger ye took!"

He slammed the heavy door shut on the stairs, locked, bolted it and saw that the cannon were in place in the passageway before he examined his hand. The bullet had smashed the first joint of his middle left finger.

Captain Neville—who had now recovered in some measure from the injuries inflicted on him by Ransom—had set about cleaning and reloading the brass cannon inside the door as soon as the artillery was brought up-stairs again. It had been at his orders that the pieces had been loaded with wadding instead of with shot, for he was humanely determined to put down the revolt with as little bloodshed as possible.

When the brothers, having brought up the cannon and the food, entered with their third burden Captain Neville stopped his work to gaze in astonishment at the limp human form with its grisly coil of rope. Before he could ask who this might be the report of the rifle-shot in the great hall startled his none-too-steady nerves. The next instant Michael had slammed the door behind him and was confronting his chief.

"Did you fire, Michael?" asked Captain Neville.

"No, sir. 'Twas one of them blackguards; but he only cut me finger," Michael answered.

He sucked blood from the wound and, making a wry face as his sole sign of pain, wrapped his handkerchief round the finger.

"I knew they'd sneak back on us as soon as they run themselves out o' breath," he went on. "An' I only wish you'd let me put shot in them brass instruments at first instead of waste and paper. I had them like pigeons in a pie.

"Howsoever, it may be as well we didn't dirty the place. But sure, captain, it would have done your heart good to seen them scatter and le'p away, and us no more nor peltin' them with confetti."

"Did Ransom run?" Captain Neville inquired as if he expected a different account of his overseer's prowess.

"I never noticed anny one in particular," Michael informed him. "It was all quick as the wink of your eyelid.

"And if you'll pardon me a minute, captain," Michael hurried on, in haste to leave the subject, "we'll bank the two tables from the arm'ry ag'in this door. We'll brace thim with thrunks an' whatsoever other weights I kin find in the arm'ry and then, thanks be, we'll have a chance for coffee and a bite of the l'avin's of thim robbers. Howsoever, they brought the stuff as far as the hall to oblige us, an' we mustn't look a gift horse in the mouth."

When Captain Neville had regained consciousness in the night Michael soon discovered that his last recollection of Ransom went back no farther than the moment when the overseer caught his throat. The captain imagined that Ransom had merely thrown him to the floor.

In consideration of the shock to which the captain had been subjected Michael supplemented the hazy memory with a plausible account of the sequel, which concealed the fact of Ransom's death.

With the captain's rather feeble assistance Michael meanwhile had dragged the tables from the armory into the passage. This ran the whole length of the wing, with rooms opening from it on either side. Away toward the end of it stood the Brothers.

They had laid Stephen Weir on the floor between them and kept their gaze toward Michael as if awaiting orders.

"Did ye note the lad with the rope that we fetched?" Michael now asked the captain.

"I've been wondering why you—"

"You'll wonder no more, sir," Michael interrupted. "He ain't much to look at in his present shape—'twas him they were howlin' and fightin' about and my, but he's a daisy with his gun for a shillelah! I seen him with me own eyes when I was spyin' out our chanst there on the stairs.

"The devil himself couldn't have put up a prettier showin' in the circumstances. Twenty an' more a'gin' one man—an' him not more nor five and twenty his las' birthday! The fools! Weren't they for hangin' him, an' him worth tin thousand dollars in American gold, y' understand?"

The captain stared in amaze at Michael,

then shut his eyes and drew his hand softly across his forehead.

"Then Ransom did have the man with—" he began.

"Not Ransom at all, sir," Michael broke in. " 'Twas Miss Susan herself that told me the lad is Stephen Weir, th' absconder, as I helped her up the stairs. What's more, she told me 'twas himself informed her who he was. What better proof would ye ask? I'll go now and have a look at him. Thief or no thief, he's a jool at fightin', an' we lose nothin' at all by thradin' Molle for him."

"If you'll keep your mind on those madmen of the Settlement," Captain Neville suggested, "I'll attend to this fellow Weir, Michael."

"You will that?" Michael asked, saluting. "And you're sure you're not overdoin' in your weak state, sir?"

"Quite sure, Michael. I wish I were as sure about Ransom. The others haven't any more brains than the law allows, but Ransom has. When he runs to cover, I feel worried, because he knows why he runs. Then he can manage those men as he pleases."

"Trust Ransom to me, sir," Michael rejoined, and as the captain walked down the passage he added under his breath: "The yellow perjurer and informer—Heaven rest his sowl!"

Captain Neville found Stephen Weir conscious, though weak and horribly bruised. He instructed the Brothers to carry him into Molle's room and place him on the bed.

Weir groaned in agony as one of the Brothers struck his arm in removing the noose from his neck.

Then it was that the captain discovered a fracture of the left arm midway between the wrist and elbow.

"Take the rope to Michael," the captain said. "He can use it to make fast the things at the door."

The captain walked after the Brothers until he came to his office, where was located his medicine-closet. It was in an alcove, a small room in itself, and contained all the supplies of a ship's pharmacy.

Here Michael came to have his finger dressed and then set out to put heart of courage into Rebecca and Jolly George, who with Jane, Rebecca's mother, had taken refuge in his own room. The elderly woman he left to her mumbling and hushed lamenting, but Rebecca and the boy he put to work at preparing breakfast for all hands.

There was an oil-stove in the captain's office, he informed Rebecca, on which she could warm the coffee brought from the hall in a huge urn. As everybody was busy and confined to a certain post, he explained, she and Jolly George must carry the breakfast about.

"And be sure," he concluded, "don't waste anythin' and only give us bare rations, for who knows when we'll have more?"

"Why, they ain't more'n enough for a day or so, Mr. Sands," Rebecca announced ominously as her practised housewife eyes surveyed the hacked portions of bread and meat. "They's nothin' but leavin's. Every piece looks like it had been bit into."

"Do the best ye can, girl," Michael urged her reassuringly. "There's a ship comin'. Oscar wirelessed for help last night, so be aisy in your mind, but prudent; y' understand?"

The promise of a ship's coming cheered Rebecca and Jolly George mightily. Even Jane ceased for a moment to lament, in order to force her daughter to tell her just when the ship would arrive.

Michael hastened away as Jane was railing at her daughter for concealing this information from her, saying to himself:

"Meself I'm not askin' that much. I'd be content if I knew for certain Molle had got me message away before they nabbed him."

The Brothers reported to him that guards were again patrolling the outside of the north wing; consequently Michael could divine that the Settlement men had retaken the great hall.

Evening stole upon Big Twin Island. Night came even more stealthily. Hours wore away. Dawn and a misty morning appeared on a timid breeze.

Incessant was the metronomic click of the heels of men on guard as they patrolled the pavement surrounding the north wing. It became irregular in beat only when the watch was relieved.

Thus day succeeded day and night followed night until five days passed.

The patience of the invaders gathered strength with the slow lapse of hours. The endurance of the besieged grew weaker for the tenseness of ill-omened monotony and for lack of provisions.

On the second day no food was served to the men, although the women did not know this. Captain Neville had a few pounds of specially prized tea in his medicine-closet; of this the men drank sparingly.

On the fourth day no food remained even for the women. What was left of the tea was apportioned among them. On the fifth day no one had other than water.

It was then that Captain Neville assembled the women in the room where Stephen Weir was on guard at the end of the wing. The windows here commanded a view of the point and the harbor. From here first would be seen the ship that should respond to the wireless call for assistance.

Something had gone wrong about that message, they all suspected—except perhaps old Jane and Jolly George; yet none would admit it to another.

All day long their dry, fevered eyes watched the horizon for a sign of smoke in the sky or the black dot of a hull. Captain Neville came frequently to scan the endless stretch of sea through his glasses.

When his search proved fruitless he would hand the binoculars to Susan, cheering her and praising her as a brave girl who would not be ill.

In the deep cup of bitterness Susan's recovery was a drop of consolation for him and for Michael Sands as well. The reconciliation with her father, whom she found well and more loving than he had ever been, and the necessity for proving her mettle as his daughter, restored Susan to her natural brave, buoyant self as if by magic.

Quite abruptly it came about that Susan Neville and Stephen Weir spoke again on the sixth night. It was long after midnight, some time after they had heard the Brothers in the passageway relieve Captain Neville and Michael.

By request of Susan, who said that Miss Addison and she would relieve Mr. Weir, Rebecca had not been awakened. Weir said he would sleep in the Morris chair at his post if he could sleep.

A faint snoring sound startled the absolute quiet of the room. It frightened Susan, harmless and promptly recognized though it was.

"Mr. Weir, please," she called in a whisper.

"Yes, Miss Neville," he answered at once.

"Why, it's poor Addie!" Susan said then. "She's played out. And she never snored before that I know."

"It's no matter, Miss Neville," Weir continued. "I rather wish you would rest, too."

"I can't. I've tried here in this chair; but I'm hoping for that boat so. The message must have gone, don't you think?"

"I hope so." Weir was silent for a moment, then added: "Miss Neville! Are you listening?"

"Yes."

They were talking almost in whispers. Miss Addison's child-like snore ceased as she moved in her chair, but did not awaken.

"You don't believe I'm a thief, do you?" he asked.

"Why, I haven't thought about it at all," she replied hesitatingly. "You see, these dreadful days—"

"But you wouldn't have stayed here tonight with Miss Addison, would you, if you did think so?"

"I believe what you tell me," she answered.

"I'm grateful to you, Miss Neville," he returned, and they spoke no more.

It was between three and four o'clock in the morning, as well as Weir could guess, when all the stars seemed to be blotted out of the sky at one stroke. A chill breeze blew up and gained in force, plastering black masses of clouds swiftly against the heavens.

The wind lasted hardly more than an hour. Yet when the first streaks of dawn began to show they looked pallid in the dun clouds.

At daylight Miss Addison was still sleeping. Susan sprang to her feet and took her earliest view of the wide sea.

Weir thought the grace and steadiness of her pose enchanting. She kept the binoculars to her eyes for a long while. Then she said:

"Mr. Weir, will you please look at once?"

He read the news in her sober face as she gave him the glasses.

"It's true," he said solemnly when he had gazed away to the northwest in the direction she indicated.

"I'll tell father," Susan announced voicelessly and went from the room.

In the next hour the sky grew darker. The steamer, sighted now by all of them, came nearer as if by swift inches. The

wall of clouds behind her brought out her hull and superstructure in high relief.

Captain Neville ventured a bet with Michael, of the first loaf of bread they should see, that the boat was a fruit-steamer.

They all laughed nervously. Scott barked in great humor. He was drawn and haggard and had not barked for days.

The captain silenced him, but allowed the dog to stand with his paws against the window-sill. Scott did not see what it was that had wrought a change in them, but wagged his tail sympathetically as he slipped back on all four feet to the floor.

The short, nervous laugh they all gave at the captain's forced sally rang long in their ears. At once they became silent again and watchful in the routine fashion.

And this was the only sign of enthusiasm at the approach of a steamer which meant more than anything in life to them—which meant life itself!

CHAPTER XXVI.

STORM.

ABOUT this time one of the Settlement men rushed into the great hall. He had climbed up from the rocky side of the north shore and hurried round to enter through the garden. A pair of marine glasses bobbed from a strap against his hip.

"Make haste! Make haste!" he cried in shrill English intonation. "A steamer's comin'—fast and steady, too—for the point!"

He ran here and there across the floor kicking into wakefulness those of his comrades who lay there. Black Henry, Jake Haas and Sailor Pete were sleeping in arm-chairs before the fire.

The sailor, now leader, was first on his feet. He bade every one to make no noise.

"How been she stand to come here?" he asked his lookout man.

"Twenty minutes and less, sir, to make the anchorage, sir."

"What been this wind yuss like?"

"Nasty and puffy wind since daybreak, sir. Dark sky and cloudy."

"Listen here, Pete; and you, Henry," Jake interrupted. "Would it be funny yet with that black sky and the wind pushin' here on toward here already the *verpflüchte* boat she hits a reef out by the point?"

"We can't jess bet on that," Black Henry returned. "But we can be abettin' them there people in the north wing is starvin' nigh almost. Can't we, Pete?"

Sailor Pete was the undisputed arbiter of all questions now.

"You been right," he replied, "and I was better right yesterday not to wait. They been starvin' then, too," he added, as he thoughtfully lit his pipe.

To the lookout he said:

"Go on back at the point and watch that steamer till you been dead sure she's bound here. Come back if you see anything we must know."

The lookout saluted and hastened out of the hall. To the guard at the door he gave word of the sighting of the steamer.

The news spread like fire in dry grass. The men off duty, who had been resting in the hall, were now standing in small groups here and there, brushing their clothes, examining their rifles and belts, and discussing the probable next move of their leaders.

"We been here talkin' fer five minutes," Sailor Pete said at length to his colleagues. "We got fifteen left. We do it, or we yuss don't do it."

He questioned Jake and Black Henry with his eyes.

"We do it," the two declared in unison.

Black Henry took three men outside.

"I tol' him already," Jake informed Pete, "not to let anybody to kill some one. We kin snatch that gang by yuss scarin' them. If's anybody killed—well, you see yet what should be when that boat's here.

"Ach! How I hate them boats with these sea-lawyer captains!"

"What you been afraid of?" Sailor Pete demanded, smiling sneeringly at Jake's fears. "We been all done before the boat been here. We been sea-lawyers on our own island."

"Good yet; but anyhow, Ransom, you know he was already always sayin' to do it without killin' people."

"Huh!" Sailor Pete grunted. "And yuss see what been happen to Ransom! Come on; the table!"

At the same moment he summoned six of the men in the hall to turn the heavy reading-table over on one side. Others brought saws which had been lying in readiness on the wall-bench.

Very soon the five legs of the table were cut off. The six men picked up the top and made their way stumbling toward the curved staircase at the end of the hall.

A squad with rifles escorted the six. Sailor Pete marched behind the men, a pistol in either hand.

With a whispered instruction from the sailor, Jake ran outside to signal Black Henry.

The men who bore the table, held vertically, reached the landing at the top of the stairs.

The escort was spread down the length of the steps, at the bottom of which stood Sailor Pete. He looked toward the door to the garden and listened. He looked to the door at the head of the staircase and listened.

Along the pavement outside the north wing men with aimed rifles stood under each window. At the simultaneous uplifting of the hand of Black Henry on the south side and of Jake Haas on the north every rifle cracked and spat forth smoke. Glass crashed in the rooms and bullets plowed their way into the ceilings.

At the same time the united strength of the six on the stair-landing drove the battering-ram made from the table with Herculean force against the door of the passage.

Sailor Pete had calculated on beating in the door with a few strokes. While the besieged were terrified and distracted with the succession of rifle-shots through the windows he and his squad would enter the passage and take possession mercifully—or as best he might. But he would take possession of the wing and the persons therein.

It was possible, of course, that Michael Sands would have his cannon loaded with shot behind that door. Yet at the worst, Pete judged, he could lose only the first rank of his men.

But the barricade built of tables by Michael Sands was almost as heavy as the table-top the Settlement men pounded against the door with such terrific force and precision. And it was made fast to doors and window-sashes with a network of rope and chains.

The men had dealt at least a dozen blows with their battering-ram, jarring the door and the walls, but effecting no more satisfactory result.

In a low voice Sailor Pete gave an order to one of the men that sent him on a run to Black Henry.

It was curious how quietly the men conducted themselves, how softly they spoke and how little, ever since Sailor Pete had them in command. They had absorbed seemingly some of his taciturnity and noiseless, effective method of action.

When they dashed their battering-ram against this door they counted, "one-two-three" almost under their breath to assure themselves of a swing all together.

Sailor Pete's messenger whispered to Black Henry and bore the same order in the same voice also to Jake Haas. Then he hastened back to the hall.

Three of the men under Black Henry's direction and three of those under Jake Haas at once began to form a human ladder of themselves. The lightest man was to perch up highest. He would be almost chin-level with the window—would receive a rifle—and was to enter the house.

With two armed men approaching from either side of the wing and the battering-ram gradually producing a more loose and hollow sound against the barricaded door, Sailor Pete considered the five minutes that still remained of the twenty allotted him by computation of his lookout.

Suddenly he was startled into consciousness of a great darkness in the hall.

It was seven o'clock in the morning. He consulted his watch again to be sure. He gazed for a moment through the shattered window of the hall toward the southwestern sky.

It was black as the smoke of soft coal and streaked with queer yellow seams of light.

"Long as it been these crazy blacks don't notice we're all right," he muttered to himself, and at the same time wondered whether Jake Haas had seen the signs of ugly weather.

Jake's back was to the sky. He was too anxious in getting the top man of his ladder safely hoisted to the window to observe the growing darkness.

Yet when a sharp puff of cold wind slapped his fat, sweating neck like a douche of ice-water he cursed Sailor Pete loudly for putting such a back-breaking, worrying job upon him. He kept dodging backward and forward, to this side and to that, helping to balance or support the middle man of his ladder.

The pounding of the battering-ram began anew within the house just as Jake's top man clamped his arms and his rifle across the window-sill.

"*Herein* with you already!" Jake yelled. "They'll run because Pete is knocking down the inside door yet."

Nevertheless Sailor Pete had at this moment halted his ramming operations temporarily.

The lookout had burst on a gallop into the hall and was yelling joyously.

"Yuss shut up that racket!" Pete commanded sternly, and ran to meet the lookout midway of the hall. "Now say what you been sayin' yuss yentle, quiet-like."

The lookout's voice was scared almost into indistinctness as he replied:

"The steamer comes up, sir, almost to the point. Then she swings round quick and hastens off like a whipped dog."

"Sure, are you?" Pete asked.

"She's bound under all speed directly back in her tracks."

"Yuss why?" Pete asked. "You know?"

"It's the devil himself comin' in that wind, sir," the lookout answered awesomely. "Please don't send me out there again. You know what those rippers are at this time o' year."

"A ripper! You yuss think it's bad as that—one o' them big, big winds?"

"The dirtiest sky I ever see, sir."

"Stay here and don't talk," said Pete.

At the window by which Jake Haas's top ladderman was to enter Jolly George appeared and laughed at the grinning face of the intruder. He held a small tin pail in his hand.

"Boy, you jess move out o' there 'cos I'm comin' in," said the top man.

"Yah—you ain't, sah," retorted Jolly George.

"Throw it, George, and no unkind words between ye!" Michael Sands roared as he passed in the hallway.

"Ha-ha!" Jolly George shrieked in laughter as he dashed the brownish-black contents of the tin pail into the face of the top man.

The man dropped in a heap to the walk and rolled there, tearing his face with his hands in agonizing pain.

"Ach!" Jake Haas bewailed, backing away from the wall of the house. "It's acid yet."

On the other side of the wing Rebecca had administered a dose of the same medicine to Black Henry's top man. He too fell squealing to the ground.

When the other two that formed the ladder and the near-by guards had watched his writhings for a moment they all became aware of the ominous look of the sky.

The puffs of wind grew stronger and more frequent.

"It's going to be a big one, I jess think," Black Henry remarked.

The signs of a storm were as familiar to them as the way to their cottages. Black Henry needed to say no more.

Round the corner of the wing Jake Haas and his men came leaping.

The cry was raised:

"The storm! The storm! 'Ware the storm!"

The darkness thickened. The wind in puffs slapped harder and more quickly in succession into their faces. Birds flew about screamingly. Trees began to creak and bend, almost crushed to earth.

The water in the bay churned wildly and grotesquely. It was dirty white in color.

Into the great hall the men trooped, frantic and wordless with terror. There were no guards, no laddermen without now.

"One-two-three," the rammers on the stair-landing still repeated under Sailor Pete's leading. Still the door and barricade of the north wing resisted his assault.

A wild screaming and beating of hurried feet sounded in the hall from the court garden. All the men except those on the stairs rushed to the doors and windows to see what this clamor might mean.

"The storm! The storm!" a dozen feminine voices screamed, and the women of the Settlement, with Mother Juliet scrambling at their heels, stamped into the great hall.

Sailor Pete turned upon them with a frightful growl of curses and bade them sit on the floor and rot, but keep their yells in their black breasts.

Two of the men at his ram were husbands of two of these women. They threw up their hands and cursed Sailor Pete to his "tallow face," as they called it, for bullying their wives.

The room was so dark now that Black Henry and Jake Haas turned on the lights. The wind raged more and more wildly. It roared about the house and shook it as if it were mere cardboard.

To talk, the men and women had to shout to one another with all the force of their lungs.

The broken windows, tokens of the invaders' first irruption into the hall, made of it a barred cage through which the rain and wind swept with ever-increasing velocity and with no resistance.

Sailor Pete drove his two rebellious men

back to the battering-ram at the point of his pistol.

"Once again, boys!" the sailor urged. "This time we do it—or run for the cellar. One, two three!"

A maniacal series of triumphant yells broke out from the toilers on the stairs as they saw the door and the barricade of the passage crumble and fall flat at last before their superhuman efforts.

The cry of victory was caught up in the hall. Men and women followed those who dashed furiously into the north wing, most of them hardly knowing why they should run into the place. Sailor Pete waited prudently for the first discharge of Michael Sands's two brass cannon.

When all the others had fled into the passage and were rummaging like unearthed rats through the room Pete, Jake and Black Henry entered circumspectly.

"Where's them there cannons?" Black Henry demanded, roaring to be heard above the savage wind.

"Yuss, where is those people yet?" asked Jake Haas, his voice snapping in a scream of amazement and rage.

"Where are those people?"

It became the watchword of the moment. Despite the darkness, the rain, and the terrible wind—which they were half-unconscious of in their anger and self-disgust at having been duped—they searched every nook and cranny of every room in the north wing.

Men and women of the besieged had vanished without leaving a trace!

The blacks were starting for the hall like led sheep behind their three leaders when a cry from Mother Juliet brought them back in leaps and bounds.

In Michael Sands's room she had discovered an end of rope fastened under the window-sill on the outside.

"That there's the rope what we was goin' to hang the Stranger with," observed one of the Settlement men.

"And I jess prognosticate from this here rope," Mother Juliet said, facing them packed in the room, like canned fish in a box, "that they's been a runnin' for the cellar. It's a terrible, terrible storm!"

She gazed for a moment at the sulfurous blackness of the sky. Turning, she continued in her low, maundering tones:

"And I jess say we, too, better run for the cellar if we don't want to be like my snakes told me"—her voice suddenly broke in a shrill falsetto—"and be torn and twisted and squeezed by this here—"

They were all ready to dash from the room, yet they dared not stir before she gave them the sign. They stared at her in hypnotic seizure, yearning to flee but powerless.

That was the last spoken sentence of Mother Juliet—

As if some titanic hand had pressed itself against the north side of Half-moon House this wing bobbed lightly on its foundations, then toppled over on its side. It's bricks and timbers, and the things and the persons within its walls were scattered on the grass like so many tons of rubbish inanimate and human.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WEIR'S STORY.

"I'VE got to tell you," Stephen Weir was talking to Susan. "You said that night you'd believe me—and I want to be right before one person I can trust before I go."

"But you must not go," she insisted, her vibrant voice tremulous and sad. "You must get better and you will, because—because we need you—all of us."

It was the second day after the terrible storm. A colony of improvised tents of tarpaulin and odds and ends of sail-cloth had sprung up in the garden on the landward side of Half-moon House under the managing eye and brain of Michael Sands.

Here were housed the survivors of the tempest that was to go down as a record-breaker in the history of Caribbean storms.

Those of the Settlement people who had survived the wreck of the north wing were housed and cared for on equal terms. Conspicuous among those who had perished were Sailor Pete, Jake Haas, Black Henry and Mother Juliet. The voodoo seeress had been thrown through the window as she was making her fatal prophecy. The three leaders had been crushed flat on the curving staircase, which they had reached ahead of all the others in the attempt at flight.

The cellar into which Michael had passed the besieged through a window, when he was certain all the invaders had taken refuge in the great hall, was built under the north wing. The wind had as it were cut the ground from under the feet of the wing

before lifting and tossing it aside and much of the débris had plunged into the cellar.

Michael, Stephen Weir, the Brothers and Jolly George had risked themselves one and all to protect the women. Jolly George gave up his young life for old Jane, who droned bitterly now by the hour in senile aberration of mind about the dangers and horrors still to come.

The Brothers came off uninjured. Michael Sands suffered a fracture of the upper arm, while Stephen Weir's right rib wall had been snapped as if the bones were mere match-sticks.

When the crash of the house sounded above their heads it smote Captain Neville with frenzy. Despite their pleadings and struggles he would not remain with the others, but, followed by Scott, the collie, ran from "the doomed, accursed spot" as he called it, cying out pathetically the name of his dead wife.

This same morning Michael had found the captain and his collie near the stone tomb of his wife. Side by side in death lay master and dog, crushed under the trunk of an uprooted tree.

Michael had broken the dread news to Miss Addison and to Susan as gently as he could; and the slow tears that filled Susan's eyes would not be stayed, though she spoke cheerfully enough to bring back the heart of courage in Stephen Weir.

"I might pull through—would, I think," he told her, "if I were home. Hospital, doctors, nurses—all that combination, you know, will drag a man back even when he's pretty far gone. But here—"

His white face was turned away wearily.

"Yet I don't know as I care so much. It's been worth it, Miss—I mean Susan—to have met a girl like you." He smiled.

"Yes, I'm glad I was flung into your face as it were by no choice of my own."

"Do we ever have any choice in things, I wonder?" she asked.

"That just hits what I'm thinking about," he rejoined quickly. "We must make a choice and must make other people let us have it. You have no choice in living here, have you?

"I've thought of what a life it must be for a young woman like you—what it was for your mother, of whom Michael has told me. It's like being in an enchanted castle where everything about you is rare and lovely, and yet you can't even enjoy a bowl of oatmeal."

Susan smiled at him in spite of her tears.

"Of course it takes nerve like mine to talk—"

"But that's what I've been telling you all along," she interrupted. "You must not talk. You must save your strength."

"No; I mean I have nerve to criticize your way of living, or your father's."

"Please, Stephen!" she murmured brokenly. "Father is dead."

She told him the story as Michael had told it to her.

"I'm terribly sorry for you and for Michael, who loved him, I could see." Stephen was silent for a few moments.

"What was it I was going to say?" he said then. "Oh, yes—it's an idea I got in my head since the storm about sacrificing one's self for others. I was thinking, I suppose, of myself—but I thought I was thinking of your mother and you here on this island, of Jolly George giving up his life for that demented old crone Jane, and last of myself. The world is full of such fools of sacrifice and I'm the biggest one of them all.

"Ten thousand dollars reward!" he moaned, laying his right hand on his eyes, his mouth twitching with shame and anguish. "Reward for me—huh! It's almost funny!"

"You must not think about it, Stephen."

"I can't help thinking about it. Why, all we went through in the siege was easy because it kept me from thinking most of the time."

"Let's talk about that steamer," Susan suggested for the purpose of diverting his mind. "She was like the king who marched up the hill and then marched right down again, wasn't she? And to think we'll never know who she was!"

"The storm scared her off, of course," said Weir. "But they'll come after me yet—and so I don't mind to go."

"What are you saying?" Susan asked, alarmed.

She feared he was becoming delirious.

"Why, Molle sent a wireless to bring them here for me so's he'll have the reward, you know," Weir told her calmly. "He and Black Henry rowed about it in the hall and that's how I know."

"Then he didn't send Michael's message at all?"

"I don't know, but I know he wirelessed about me," Weir answered. "And let me tell you something. If I were to live—but what's the use?"

He pressed his hand against his side to ease the pain.

"First Ransom wanted it, didn't he?" said Susan. "Then Molle; then Black Henry and the others, I suppose, when they heard about it."

"And by thunder, no one is going to get it!" he cried angrily.

"Don't—please don't excite yourself," Susan entreated. "You must get better for"—her breath caught—"for all of us."

The news spread through the hospital-encampment in the garden that a steamer was dropping anchor off the point. Michael Sands, it was said, had gone out in a row-boat to board her.

But Susan could not interest Weir in the arrival of the boat, which would mean he might have the care and treatment that would save his life.

"My father, you know," he said, more as if rehearsing it all to himself than to communicate the information to her, "was cashier of the bank and one of the strongest men on the board. I was started with the Palladium as soon as I left college.

"My mother died before I was four and my stepmother was always kind and thoughtful when I was home, which was not often after my seventh year. I was one of those children brought up by people paid to dole out parental care and instruction.

"It's queer how a man can look back on a whole lifetime in a second as if he were looking through some kind of magic binoculars; isn't it, Susan?"

He reached for her hand. She gave it willingly. His eyes were all gratitude and tenderness at her simple, free manner of doing this.

"Vernon Hart Tulk, the present vice-president of the Palladium," Weir went on, "was father's senior by a few years and had helped him at his start with the company. They were that sort of thick-and-thin friends that you read about in books and never see. They were, really.

"Three years after father died Tulk married my stepmother. I lived in my own apartment, of course, but saw them several times a week. It was not hard for them to treat me as a son, I fancy. And they were all the kin, such as they were, I had in the world.

"One day—Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed in sudden grief. "How I hate to talk of it! And how it burns in my brain always!"

"Then don't talk of it, Stephen," she urged, stroking his hand; "not until you're better."

"That's just it! I can't get better. The wreck, the beating I got from those blacks and the storm—Why I'm just like the one-hoss shay; I'm going to pieces all over."

"Won't you try to get better? Even try?" she asked softly.

"Of course—for you," he said, pressing her hand. "But Tulk, you know; we were at Tulk. He had taken about five thousand dollars of the bank's money that he should not have touched. I knew it when he took the money. I even showed plainly by my manner that I did not think he ought to take it.

"But he smoothed my objections over. Mind you, he is vice-president. I was merely an employee in my fourth year's service.

"No one but Tulk and I could know of that transaction until it should be discovered. Of course he was going to put it right back; they all say that. And of course a special accountant happened in on the books before he did put the money back.

"The next I heard of it I was summoned before the board to explain the shortage of five thousand dollars. They had had me shadowed, it appeared, and had found no evidence of rash spending or speculating. They told me plainly I was either a dupe or an idiot to lose five thousand dollars in such a suspicious way.

"They gave me an hour alone in the room to think my situation over. When they returned Tulk, my father's life-long friend, my foster-father, wore the same sympathetic, regretful expression his face had shown all during my examination.

"I was stupefied. I was unable to explain the loss of the five thousand dollars. They were horribly gracious and forgiving to me in a speech made by the president. They would not prosecute for the sake of the memory of my father and to avoid scandal for the bank. If I were an honest man I would return the money when I could.

"They were all sorry for me and kept their eyes lowered. That saved Tulk's face. I wanted to get up and cry out against him. But I could prove nothing. It was my word against his, and my word was already ruined beyond repair.

"I walked from that bank—where I had a small balance that I made no mention of to them—to my savings bank and drew all I had. I simply could not think of seeing

my stepmother or Tulk again, though I was sure she knew nothing of his doings.

"She was married to him. He was simply incredible to me. I spent the rest of that day and night in Philadelphia, and on the following sailed in the Cacique."

Susan gasped in astonishment.

"Then all this about the loss of the seventy-five thousand dollars was news to you as well as to us!" she exclaimed.

He grasped her hand tighter and drew it to his lips.

"And you mean to say to me, Stephen Weir," she protested hotly, "that you have any right to die in these circumstances?"

"Of course," Stephen said, pursuing his own thought, "I can see now that Tulk was in much deeper than the five thousand when I saved him as a fool of sacrifice. If I could go back—" The pain in his side stifled his voice.

"You shall go back!" she cried. "You have got to go for—that is, for all of us here! There's a ship—"

Susan paused and stood up.

Michael Sands came up to her.

"Are you better yet?" he asked Weir, taking Stephen's hand. "Oh, you liar, you! You joker, makin' our mouths water with the story of a tin-thousand-dollar reward—and you not worth no more nor me nor Miss Susan to the police of anny country."

Both Susan and Weir laughed.

"You didn't overhear us talking, Michael," she said, "so how did you guess it?"

"Guess it, is it? I know. And Molle, the rabbit!" Michael retorted. "I'm glad he wasn't kilt by the wind, if only to hear my news. What does he do that night I sent him to the point but wireless that Stephen Weir of the Cacique was washed upon our beach, and, 'owing to conditions, we can't keep him long'—his very words. The lady showed me the message," Michael added.

"What lady?" Susan asked.

"Mrs. Vernon Tulk of New York," Michael answered, "who comes down here in this fruit ship to claim the body of Stephen Weir. 'Owin' to conditions, we can't keep him long!' "

Michael roared with laughter as he repeated the phrase.

"The conditions bein' the devil's own power in his arm and a heart of oak—Oh, Molle, you changeling, you!"

"Where is Mrs. Tulk?" Weir asked excitedly.

"Now, be aisy, or I'll tell you nothin'," Michael rejoined. "She's on the ship—too weak and ill with what she's been through to dare venture to land, I think. The ship tasted the storm, too, y' know. I had a long talk with her, me boy, and you're to go back.

"Everythin' is cleared up by the sudden and prepared death of Mr. Tulk—"

He caught Weir's hand as he made this statement with obvious bravado.

"You mean he killed himself?" Weir asked.

"I divined that. The finding of the upturned boat of the Cacique didn't worry him much, I imagine. The sea has a close mouth, but the bank finally discovered who actually got the seventy-five thousand dollars. A bank always gets the real culprit some time or other. In most cases it's other."

"That's too bad for Mrs. Tulk," said Weir.

"It is; she needs you, lad. And you need a hospital—the real thing; not my nursing and surgeoning. I told Mrs. Tulk that I'd have you, Miss Susan and Miss Addison aboard late to-morrow."

"Addie and I!" Susan gasped. "What have we to do there, Michael?"

"Your father's gone, and I'm a lone, sorrowed man," Michael explained to her in a broken voice. "I'll lay him here for a while in the grave beside your mother and see what I can do with Big Twin for you. It's marketable, but the folly of it as a home for the likes of you is exploded. I wouldn't yield you to Stephen here so willingly if ye hadn't been grippin' holt of each other all the time I've been here, and if it wasn't that I've noticed Miss Addison wanderin' about like a mother cat that's lost its kitten.

"I'll take a kiss on my cheek, Susan child, for old time's sake and the givin' over of you to Stephen.

"There, Stephen!" he added. "That's one you'll never have—and now my back's to you, you've the world to yourselves!"

Susan fell on her knees beside the bed and laid her face lightly against Stephen's, her lips to his.

Away strode Michael, whistling quite unconsciously Jolly George's quaint, plaintive melody about the Bay of Biscay.

THE END.

The Log-Book

By the Editor

A MONTH or so ago I asked you readers to tell me whether or not you often noted the names of the authors who write the stories you enjoy in THE ARGOSY. Several answers have already come in, some of which you will find in the Log letters that follow. I shall be glad to hear from more of you on the matter. Meanwhile, Tudor Jenks, whose clever short story, "Bricks Without Straw," appeared in the March ARGOSY, granted an interview to a representative of the New York *Times*, in the course of which he touched upon this very subject.

"Grown people," he said, "are almost as indifferent to the names of authors as are children. Certain names are dinned in their ears by publishers, but only the best-known names mean anything to them."

There is an awful lot of truth in this. I say "awful," because I am an author myself; at least I used to be. When American magazines first started, all the contributions were anonymous, just as they are in a newspaper to-day. There were no so-called "best-sellers" in those times, so that the writer of a knockout hit was not able to land his next and possibly very prosaic product with an editor on the strength of the reputation he had achieved with his first work. You see, there are certain advantages in this no-name system.

This recalls the fact that big renown waited on a Boston firm's string of novels issued many years ago on the same plan and called the "No Name Series." As I recall them, they were all crackerjack stories. You see, they had to be. To use a homely simile, every tub was obliged to stand on its own bottom. Besides, added to the intrinsic merit of the story itself for the public, was the added zest of guessing at who the author might be.

Some month I may decide to surprise my ARGOSY constituency by printing a book-length novel minus the author's signature. I wonder how you would like that. Meantime, next month I am taking you out on the high seas in

"SHIPS OF STRIFE"

BY CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE

a complete novel in eighteen chapters, which carries a member of the Millionaires' Club of San Francisco in spite of himself into an atmosphere areek with sea winds, sea fights, and a peril which is his closest companion.

Most ocean tales concern themselves with one vessel. Here are two, with but little to choose in depth of villainy betwen those who sail both of them. Conflict, we are told, is the essence of plot. In "Ships of Strife" there is conflict from the word go, and as a contrast to the novels of shop and motor-car, city and mystery I have been giving you

of late, you could not find anything to beat this story of the race for treasure between the Marshall and the Foster.

Sheer novelty is the key-note of the Three-Part Serial that starts in June. Its title is

"HIS MAD MOVE ON THE MOVIES"
BY STEPHEN BRANDISH

and you will get such a thrill in the reading as you have seldom experienced even from gazing at certain weird showings on the screen itself. Revenge is a potent motive, and *James Darton* fancies he has good cause to wreak it on the fifth industry in the country. You have all seen what one man with a vast fortune tried to do against war. In "His Mad Move on the Movies" you will read what happened when another man, unexpectedly endowed with wealth, seeks to exert his power in a somewhat opposite direction.

THE FOUR GEORGES

not the English kings, of whom Thackeray has written so entertainingly, but four authors bearing that prefix will be represented in the June ARGOSY table of contents, for besides the second instalment of George M. A. Cain's absorbing serial, "From Dusk to Dark," there will be a stirring "human document" narrative, "Twelve a Week Short," by George Mariano, a capital motorcycle tale, "Solid Ivory," by George M. Johnson, and "Three Drives," a society yarn, by George Foxhall.

A VOICE FROM THE TRENCHES

I treasure the letter that appears below, coming as it does from a reader on active service with his regiment at the front in the Great War. It is written on special stationery bearing at the top the printed words: "Do not mention your rank, battalion, brigade, or the names of places, expected operations, movements or numbers of troops; casualties, previous to publication of official lists, or make specific reference to the moral or physical condition of troops." The letter bears date January 16, 1916, and was mailed at a field post-office, and I certainly hope it won't be the last one our friend writes for the Log-Book.

"Somewhere in Flanders."

As you will see from the heading, I am a member of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces, at present Somewhere in Flanders. This is my first, and very probably my last, attempt for the Log-Book. Your January issue has just reached me, being forwarded from home, and I have been reading about the good things you have in stock for us next month. I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for several years, and I have no kick of any kind to register. In my humble opinion it is the best of the fiction magazines, whether American or English. My favorite authors are H. Bedford-Jones, Zane Grey, and Jackson.

Wishing you and THE ARGOSY every success, I remain, W. J. LAWSON.

DOESN'T ASSOCIATE AUTHORS WITH THEIR STORIES

After I had written the remarks with which the Log-Book starts off this month, the subjoined, bearing directly on the subject, came to hand. The writer, to whom I am indebted for his courtesy, writes on his own letter-head, but signs merely with his initials.

Chillicothe, Missouri.

I note your request in the Log-Book of the March number to hear from readers who never note the authors of a story. I confess I am one of these, and also one who has never read the Log-Book until recently. I think I am, and have been all my life, an unusual devotee to the pleasure to be found in reading fiction, both in book and magazine form; but in that time I think that Jack London in his earlier works is the only author who is associated in my mind with his books. I couldn't for the life of me tell whether the author of "The Girl of the Limberlost," "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine," *et cetera*, was Harriet Beecher Stowe or O. Henry, and they are my favorite books.

I enjoy the *Tarzan* tales, and I think one who would knock on such must be narrow-minded, indeed, for such imagination is a blessing to be cultivated. I must admit my preference for THE ALL-STORY. I enjoy the book-length novels in THE ARGOSY, but the serials suit me best in a weekly publication.

L. V. H.

THE ARGOSY A MAGAZINE OF ACTION

I'm right with Mr. Chalfant in his wish to have other things than comment on stories discussed in the Log-Book. The space I give this month to remarks on the publication of author's names is an indication of my eagerness to widen the scope of the department. I have another

topic listed, having nothing whatever to do with stories or authors, which I may spring on you next month.

Bluffton, Indiana.

The letter of H. H., expressing the view that characters in THE ARGOSY and modern American fiction *do not talk*, suggests to me that if he was making search in THE ARGOSY for love dialogue, he got hold of the wrong magazine. THE ARGOSY abounds in wholesome, invigorating literature, the kind that arouses dormant ambition, puts away sluggish activity. The kind that enlivens the mind, quickens the pulse without impuring the heart. The kind of stories that are original in conception, full of admiring action, possess a high quality of literary merit, and delight the fireside.

The kind of fiction that H. H. is looking for exists, however, and plentifully, too, but not in THE ARGOSY. He will find it in scores of cheaper-grade periodicals—quiet love scenes, love plots, love entanglements, and love climaxes, where the heroine does *not* topple over a waste-basket into her hero's arms to bring him to his senses. He will find it in Libbey, Sheldon, and numerous others, idyllic settings, charming *talk, talk*. Evidently our foreign friend has been either unwisely guided in his selection of American authors, or his judgment perverted by European standards.

Let me say, however, that credit is due to H. H. for bringing to the Log-Book a live-wire subject. It may awaken the interest that Lovecraft (and the attending repartee) brought to its columns a year or two ago. At any rate, the topic will be a divergence from the continuous monopoly of tiresome flattery and criticism of THE ARGOSY and ARGOSY authors. Stir up new things for discussion in the Log-Book, and the novelty will increase not only a new and greater interest therein, but will add further the pleasure of expectancy.

FRANK CHALFANT.

AN AUTHOR SAYS "THANK YOU"

When I bought it I felt that "All He Had To Give" in the March ARGOSY was a story of rather more than ordinary qualities, one likely not only to hold attention closely in the reading, but to linger in the memory afterward. And so I gladly accede to the request of the author embodied in the following note:

Springfield, Massachussets.

Will you kindly thank for me through the Log-Book a reader in Mount Vernon, Ohio, who sent me a little unsigned note containing the words:

"Thank you for 'All He Had To Give.'"

I like that. I like it because it is short and direct, and because it is unsigned, as if the writer realized that names and persons are unimportant things compared with the fact that two people can meet on a common ground of sympathy simply because they are human beings and understand.

GEORGE FOXHALL.

WHEN THE STORY OF THE ARGOSY WAS TOLD

In reply to some of the queries of our Texas friend voiced below, I can say that a full history of THE ARGOSY, written by Mr. Munsey, was printed in the magazine for December, 1907, the twenty-fifth anniversary number. As to an extension of the Log-Book, that is a matter of expediency as occasion may arise, although, of course, I should like to hear what my readers have to say about it. Regarding a story that starts in the Far North and ends up in the Sunny South, I can't undertake to provide a tale merely for its background; but if one of sterling worth in other respects turns up and ranges in its scope of action between the two extremities of latitude mentioned, I shall be delighted to give place to it.

Uvalde, Texas.

I have written to THE ARGOSY on several occasions. In fact, I can't keep from saying something when I read a good story—in fact, I should say good stories, for they are all good, from cover to cover.

Now, Mr. Editor, I would like to know how many readers of THE ARGOSY will agree with me for an extension of the Log-Book, also a story of THE ARGOSY, its origin, and where it got its name; in fact, every detail that concerns THE ARGOSY from its beginning until now. And I would also like to ask you, Mr. Editor, how many readers of this great fiction magazine will agree with me to ask you for a story—book-length novel complete—that will combine the Great North and snowy country, and the south where there is forever spring.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for ten years, and I am inclined to say that it is the best magazine written.

JAMES ANDERSON.

MUSTN'T EXPECT WORSHIP AND THE DIME TOO

Although as a rule I do not care to print communications not signed with the real names of the writers, the letter below is so informative, and bears so directly upon the matter treated in my introductory remarks this month, that I am sure you will all be interested in sharing it with me. Thus far, you will note, nobody appears to pick his stories by author's names.

Toronto, Canada.

MR. KEEPER OF THE LOG:

I have been a reader of your ARGOSY for many years, and wish to compliment you upon your 1915 output. When a man has been the means of my enjoying hundreds of pleasant hours, I think it but just that I should let him know that I appreciate his work. I read about twenty-odd magazines regularly, and when I say I read them, I mean that I start with the first line and go straight through to the last line, skipping nothing. I enjoy everything in a magazine. No story of whatever kind comes entirely amiss. Although some are of much higher quality than others, none is so unworthy that I cannot get some pleasure from it.

I do not like serials, yet I dip into them and taste them and find them good. So with several other classes of stories.

Of course THE ARGOSY is not the "best magazine in the world." Still, I don't object to any

one "buttering-up" the editor a little. It does us no harm, but rather puts us all in good humor. THE ARGOSY is better than "the best." It holds a fine average of quality the year around, and steadily raises the standard of that average. The "best" magazines are prone to run in and out—one month being very good, the next month very bad.

As to authors, I rarely look at their names, and never before I read their work. I judge a magazine by the work it puts before me for my reading. If I am particularly taken with a story, I may look to see who wrote it. The name of the author is of small interest to any one but himself, and to him but a financial asset. If he is paid for his work, even though he bleeds at every pore in the doing of it, he cannot expect me to pass my worship over the counter with my dime. Writing is his trade. And none of us expect the world to worship a workman merely because he does good work. Big stuff is what we readers look for—not "Big Names."

Yours, in a friendly way,
AN OLD CHAP.

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE —AND THE ARGOSY

Mr. Cooper ought to be especially well pleased with the present issue of THE ARGOSY. The book-length novel is longer than usual; two serials, which mean long stories, start, and there are very few shorts. I think we have printed communications from his part of Canada before, but that fact didn't shoot his letter into the receptacle he modestly thought it was headed for.

Three Hills, Alberta.

I have just finished THE ARGOSY, and looking through the Log-Book I don't see as many kickers as usual. But I have just one kick to make. I would rather have more long stories than so many short ones; but as my wife is a Yankee, I tell her you are doing pretty well for a Yankee.

Well, I haven't seen a name in the Log-Book from this neck of the woods. I suppose this will go to the W. P. B., too.

C. E. COOPER.

A HINT OF WHAT'S COMING

When our friend from Portland asks why we can't have more stories by Terhune, he evidently has historical tales in mind. Well, the world is making history so fast just now on the other side of the Atlantic that stories of the past are apt to seem a bit tame by contrast. Which reminds me that I'm going to start a crackerjack serial, "The Star of Adventure," in a month or two that will combine both the past and present in enchanting fashion. Nor do I mean wholly to abandon yarns of the picturesque long ago. There is one being written for me now, which I hope to announce in the near future. Note, please, what Mr. Jones has to say about serials.

Portland, Oregon.

I have read THE ARGOSY for almost eight years, and never miss a copy. Always liked *Hawkins* and Fred Jackson, but know you can't please everybody. Why can't we have some more of Terhune's stories? I always liked his stories the best of any I ever read.

I like the long stories, but can't say I don't like serials, for one always looks for the next issue of the magazine if it contains an interesting serial. Anyhow, give us THE ARGOSY as good in the future as you have in the past, and nobody should have any kick coming.

M. P. JONES.

TAKES UP THE CUDGELS FOR JONES AND JACKSON

Here's a correspondent who contrives to answer two comments made at different times in the Log-Book, and thus appeals strongly to me. You see, the story's the thing to him, not the man who writes it, although Jones and Jackson do appear to loom up as individual identities in his mind.

Zeeland, Michigan.

I just got through reading the March issue of THE ARGOSY, and think it's the best ever. It's a good investment at ten cents, and if anybody gets an additional profit out of it by kicking or knocking, why, let 'em go to it; but, just the same, send on your ARGOSY, for it is sure some book. I have been reading it some years; have always bought it at news-stands when I could get it, and when not, why, I had to do without, for, you see, sometimes a man gets to a place where Uncle Sam does not come with the mail-sacks, and that is the only time I do without THE ARGOSY.

I think if I write you again it will be many miles from here; but keep on printing THE ARGOSY, for when I get back to God's country, I will sure be looking for it. I do not very often take note who writes the stories, but they are all good. As to their being bloody, why, no such thing. The stories Jones and Jackson wrote are the real thing; such things really do happen.

Your *amigo*,
P. H. GREENHOUSE.

FROM INSIDE THE LINES IN TURKEY

From war-ringed Constantinople comes this postal-card, telling us that THE ARGOSY is doing its beneficent work of cheer in far-off Turkey. The card bears date December 20, 1915. So the Christmas referred to in it must be that of 1914.

Constantinople, Turkey.

DEAR MR. EDITOR:

It's just about a year since I drove in through the snow to get my ARGOSY for the last time and have a yarn with "Doc" at the drug-store. Just after Christmas I went home back to the army again. It's just over four months since the Turks, having made holes in me, picked me up and sent me here to patch them up again.

I'm the only Englishman here. It's been lonesome enough, but old Doc hasn't forgotten a friend and constant reader of THE ARGOSY, and this morning brought me the November number. He couldn't have sent me anything more welcome. The old ship seems better than ever in

spite of the reduced fare. Good luck to you and your readers.

ARTHUR DAWES,
Captain in the Gurkha Rifles.

A NEAT TRIBUTE FROM ALABAMA

Here's an account of the way in which a fellow came to be enrolled in THE ARGOSY's passenger-list. Mr. Williams's letter, though brief, is very explicit, and I thank him for such unmistakable expressions of approval.

Birmingham, Alabama.

I began reading THE ARGOSY when a friend of mine gave me the copy containing "Men in the Raw," and I have bought each number ever since. I have no criticisms to make, as I like it just as it is. I am, and expect to remain, an enthusiastic supporter of THE ARGOSY.

DOYLE WILLIAMS.

A REVIEW OF THE ARGOSY IN RHYME

Mr. Horton asks me what I think of it. I suppose he means the verse. Well, I'm printing it, which means that it's an improvement on other ventures of the sort that are sent in for the Log. But some of the lines certainly limp in the feet. Possibly now that they stand forth in the cold light of type, Mr. Horton can see this for himself. If he does, I wish he'd write again and tell me so. In any case, I appreciate the compliment he pays our magazine, and am glad he enjoyed the story about his home town, as mentioned in his P. S.

Newark, New Jersey.

I don't suppose you'll print this, but I won't worry over that.
I just *had* to write and tell you, to your Log I tip my hat.
THE ARGOSY is in a class all by its little self,
And all the kickers kicking will not put it "on the shelf."
Of course, you can't please all of us, but why worry and complain?
The kickers who are finding fault read *everything* just the same.
They don't have to buy the book if they don't like the style,
But I notice the circulation's increasing all the while.
So then let the kickers knock and the boosters boost real high,
Just treat us all as in the past and the magazine we'll buy.
And now, Editor of the Log-Book, your style it is immense;
May your success continue and THE ARGOSY remain ten cents.

Respectfully,
H. C. HORTON.

N. B.—As William Shakespeare *never* said, these are my sentiments, expressed to the best of my ability. Should they please you, I am pleased; I am pleased anyway.

P. S.—"Four Speeds For Forest Hill" was clever. I ought to know. Local stuff. Get me?

LOOKS AT THE AUTHOR'S NAME LAST

Yet another comment on author's names. Poor authors! They don't seem to count much, do they. Their product is the thing which, after all, is as it should be, when one comes to analyze the situation.

Helena, Arkansas.

I noticed in your Log-Book the request about reading the authors' names. I never look at the name till after I read the story. Then I look it up and make a mental note in my memory for or against the author. I have taken THE ARGOSY for years. I read my first copy as soon as I was able to read anything, and have taken it ever since. I have one kick to make against THE ARGOSY. I am "baching" and working steady, and whenever I get THE ARGOSY I read nearly all night, so I lose many hours' sleep. I like most of the stories. If one does not suit me, I pass it by, and think the next will suit me better.

WILLIAM NIES.

LOG-BOOK JOTTINGS

W. F. Saunders, Boston, Massachussets, wants to know "what happened to 31754? Is it crippled or drunk, or is it part of the mystery that it changes to 31745? It's got my goat." Harold B. Marshall, Bangor, Maine, declares he couldn't get along without THE ARGOSY, and adds that he can spend a pleasant evening at any time when he has THE ARGOSY to read. Frank L. Harrison, Waynetown, Indiana, has been reading THE ARGOSY since 1898, and likes most of our authors, but especially Ogden, Rath, and Jones. M. E. Searle, Saylor, Oklahoma, has read THE ARGOSY for several years, and has no kick to make on it, "because one Zane Grey story a year is worth the price." He always reads the Log-Book. Thomas M. Parsons, Talladega, Alabama, who wants patriotic stories, is referred to in the reply made to M. P. Jones elsewhere in this month's Log.

W. J. Morgan, Akron, Ohio, will be delighted to note that a sea novel by Captain Dingle is announced for next month. He says he has read only one story that did not suit him—"On the Pinions of Doom"—and endorses a request made in the February Log that we reprint some of the old stories because "I would like to read one myself, just as we all like to hear the old songs we sang long years ago." John R. Bell, Lawrence, Kansas, began to read THE ARGOSY as a small boy, and for over twenty years has never missed a copy. That's how THE ARGOSY suits him. As an offset to Mr. Morgan's opinion above on a certain novel, J. E. Todd, of Atlanta, Georgia, considers "On the Pinions of Doom" a very good story, indeed. Elizabeth Cary Williamson, Lexington, Kentucky, thought, until she read the January ARGOSY, that Zane Grey was a woman, and so thinking was curious to understand how she could know so well the workings of a man's mind, the habits of camp life, *et cetera*.

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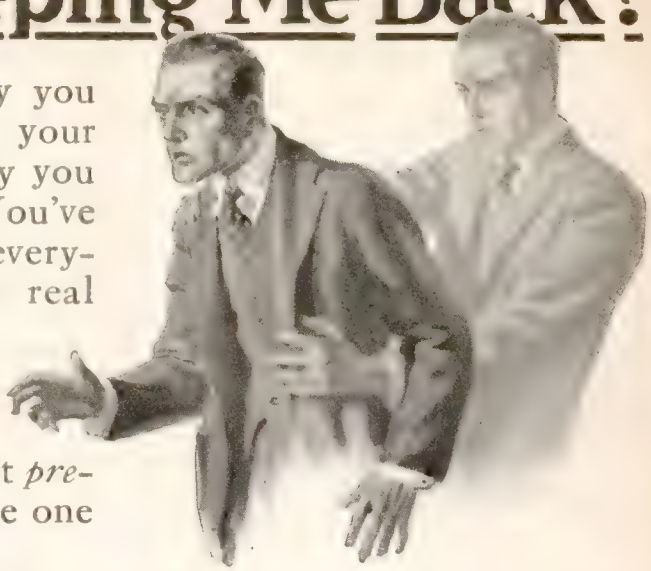

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☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
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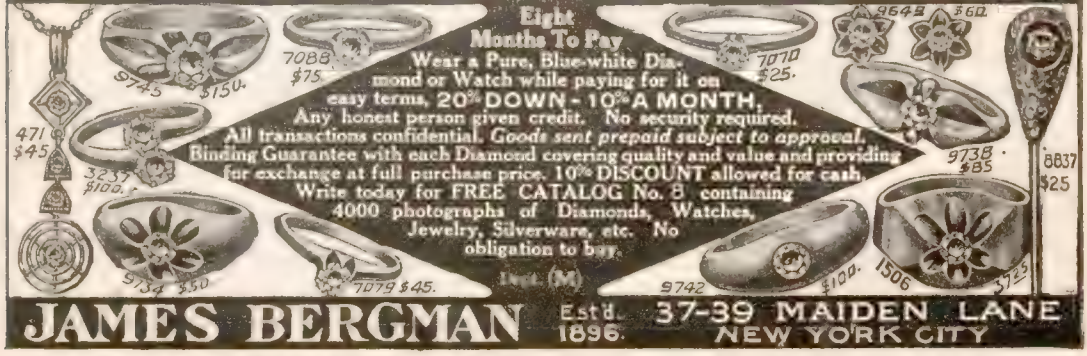

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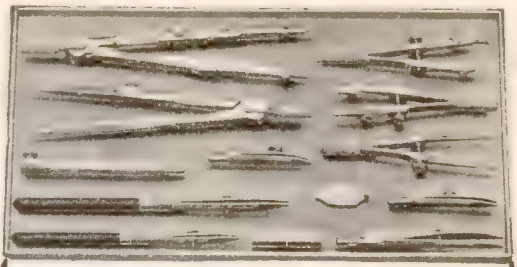

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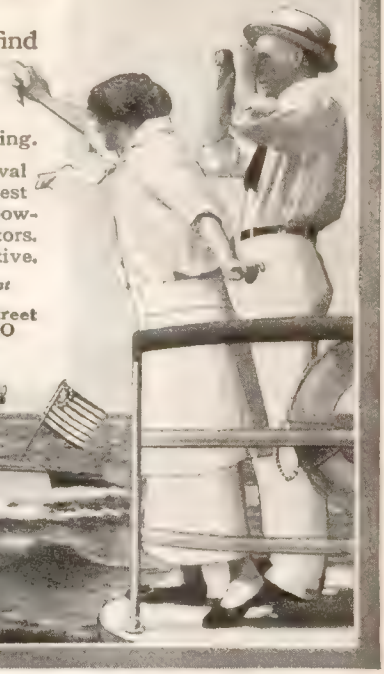

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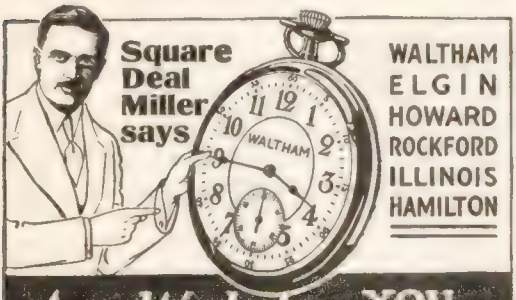

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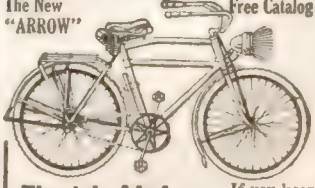

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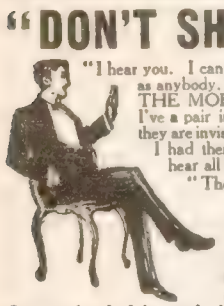

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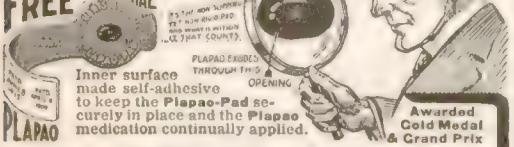

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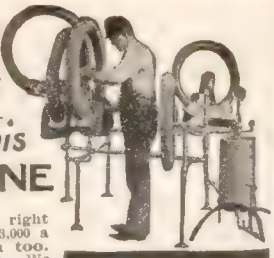

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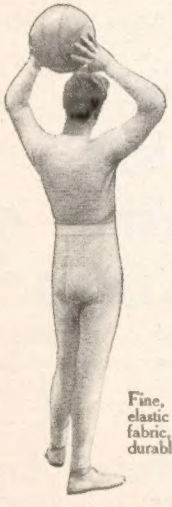

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